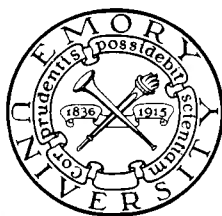


THE
BROKEN
VOW

Knox Little



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THE BROKEN VOW

A Story of Here and Hereafter.

BY

W. J. KNOX LITTLE,

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STAFFORDSHIRE.

AUTHOR OF "THE CHILD OF STAFFERTON."

NEW EDITION.

LONDON—CHAPMAN AND HALL,
LIMITED.

1889.

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Dedication.

I DEDICATE THIS LITTLE STORY

TO

MY DEAR CHILDREN,

ROSE AND RHODA,

AND MORE ESPECIALLY TO

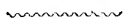
RHODA,

IN MEMORY OF AN AUTUMN AND WINTER

SPENT BY US MUCH ALONE, BUT NOT IN LONELINESS

BECAUSE TOGETHER.

PREFACE.



THE story which follows was written, with other like trifles, at a time when, by severe illness, I was precluded from attempting more serious work.

To transcribe Lady Dorothy's MS. was then to me a pleasant diversion from graver and more troubling thoughts. It was done, for the most part, in the course of two or three nights, which otherwise would have been of excessive tedium from sleeplessness or pain. The story, therefore—such as it is—may, perhaps, I think, serve to brighten or to while away some weary hour for others. If it should, I shall hope that the time employed upon it has not been altogether wasted, and so that I shall not have to blame myself

for spending a few stray sad hours on anything that may seem so fanciful and slender.

Though it is, in a sense, "a ghost story," it cannot pretend to the dignity of being thorough-going and terrible; and should any kind reader (for are not readers proverbially "kind"?) open this little volume in the expectation of finding something tragic, startling, and crowned with a crashing close, I am bound, in honesty, to beg him or her to allow the crash to come at once, and the close to synchronize with the beginning.

In a sense, of course, it is a romance, but it may be said with truth that it is not a *mere* romance, for the preternatural part of it has seemed to me to have at least some sort of foundation in the mystic dreamland of spiritual experience; and the rest to represent, in some sense, real and more tangible fact. And should any who have ears to hear find in it allegory or speculation not all uninteresting to them, I shall be glad to think that they are not unmoved

by what is full of mystery and interest to myself.

However this may be, at least I have tried to place before my readers one of the simplest, purest, and most sincere of characters that I have ever known. If they do not love and admire Lady Dorothy as I do, let them believe—I would beseech—that the fault is not in her, but rather in the failure of “this low-pulsed, forthright, craftsman’s hand of mine.”

W. J. KNOX LITTLE.

HOAR CROSS, STAFFORDSHIRE.

March 10th, 1887

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION.

THE issue of a third edition of "The Broken Vow" gives me an opportunity of expressing the pleasure I feel at the kindness of its reception. Of the various reviews of it which I have seen, all (which have any claim to serious attention) have been intelligent, and kindly, and fair. By these, and by the still more valuable criticisms of eminent men who have conveyed their views in private correspondence, I am led to notice two things:—

(1) Serious and thoughtful people, I think, seem now much more than at one time to be alive to the reality, nearness and beauty of the unseen world, and to the fact of the continuity between the life of the spirit in this its scene of human probation and its further life in the region beyond the grave. In consequence, probably, of this—notwithstanding, of course, the existence still of plenty of bigotry and unbelief—there appears to be among us less of that most heartless and unchristian neglect of duty—neglect of praying for the dead.

(2) And, again, *this* seems true;—there are many, of course, who are completely

enthralled by the (so-called) "scientific spirit." To them anything beyond what is visible and tangible seems a mere dream. They do not, it is true, deny themselves the luxury of high flights of imagination, nor fail to put a considerable strain on the powers of faith possessed by their disciples; but all this is in the region of material things, and of the laws which seem to govern them. The moment it is a question of their own human souls, and of the mystery of souls no longer "in the body," they brush the matter aside with contempt as mere "transcendentalism." None the less, I observe there is an increasing number who are not victims to this kind of spiritual insensibility. They approach facts of the spiritual and unseen in a more really scientific temper, and they recognize that the question of sensible or conscious contact with the living who are dead is not a question for cheap but stupid ridicule, but for evidence and thought.

"La sensation trop intense de la vie aspire à la mort." The highest, happiest, noblest things in this life stimulate the prisoned spirit in us to a closer sense of the other world; and some of the purest and simplest of characters have not been

weakened but strengthened by a calm and habitual contemplation of the state of those who live upon "the farther shore."

As one reviewer, I notice, seems to think—not unnaturally—that the idea of the ghostly funeral in Chapter V must have been suggested by "The Beleaguered City," it may not be uninteresting to my readers to learn that notes of that scene were taken by me from a personal experience some two years before "The Beleaguered City" was published, and—with the entire approval of the person who had so strange an experience—were made use of, *mutatis mutandis*, in "The Broken Vow."

I desire here and now to thank many "unknown friends" who have assured me that my slender effort has not been valueless;—that I have given them pleasure, that they have been interested by my book in questions to me of deepest interest, and—last, not least—that it has seemed to them that my love and admiration for my little heroine have not been misplaced or overstrained.

W. J. KNOX LITTLE.

HOAR CROSS, STAFFORDSHIRE.

September 4th, 1887.

THE BROKEN VOW:

A STORY OF HERE AND HEREAFTER.



THE following story I have written down partly from a MS. in my mother's handwriting, given to me by herself, partly from her own dictation. Perhaps this is too strong an expression, for all that the *dictation* supplied was only a few additions and corrections in some minor details. The story, in the main, she herself read to me on the morning of the very day on which she was so suddenly taken from us. Everything in it, therefore, rests upon her authority.

My father and mother were much beloved by all who knew them. They were both remarkably handsome : I have always thought—though of course I am no impartial witness—the two very handsomest people I have ever seen. Indeed no one who came near them could fail to be struck with something about them altogether exceptionally attractive. It was not merely that their love to one another was to the last most noble and perfect, a love possessing all the grace and courtesy of high-minded youthful lovers, with all the deepening tenderness of those who had been “true and tried,” “well and long,”—but in both of them there was also a striking simplicity and limpid clearness of character which seemed to connect itself with a faith complete and practical in the unseen world.

As my brother—the present Earl—and myself grew older, vague stories reached us of something out of the common in the history of their courtship ; and the strange and impressive words which fell from them when in the remotest degree we ventured to approach the subject, convinced us both that these stories were not without foundation in fact.

After our dear father's death—just one year to the very day before my mother's—we begged the latter to let us know the truth. She told us that it was my father's wish that she should do so, and the result was the following story.

In it she touches lightly upon the general tenor of her girlish days, but it is chiefly concerned with three startling incidents, of which the last is to me the most moving. These incidents, in their extraordinary and

supernatural character, are, I think, most remarkable. I suppose there are many who would—not unnaturally—attribute her entire belief in the facts she narrates to her peculiar temperament, and perhaps in no small measure to her lonely life. I need not discuss the question, as I rather wish to leave her to tell her own tale for what it is worth. To *her*, however, these incidents were most real, and—I may add without offence—they are so to me. What moves me most in them is a shadowy thread of meaning which seems to connect them together, and no one will blame *me* for being deeply and tenderly touched by the last act of all. Indeed it will, I think, be seen that she narrates just so much of her life as is necessary in order to the understanding of this same extraordinary incident which immediately preceded her

marriage, and which brings the story to its close. This incident, taken in connection with the others, is so remarkable, and appears so calculated to throw some further light upon a very mysterious subject, viz. our relations with the unseen world, that a perusal of the whole may, I think, be interesting to many outside our more immediate family.

Beyond this, however, *why* I love her story is because it so unconsciously furnishes the reader with a faithful photograph of herself—of the simplest, purest, most sincere, most lovable character I have ever known.

In days like those in which we live, the rush of life is so overwhelming that, on the one hand, the supernatural world is almost forgotten, and on the other—by force of contrast, I suppose—when it *does* touch us closely, it is very keenly felt.

If so the strangeness of her story, together with the remarkable calm which broods over it all, cannot fail to give it an interest. For indeed—at least I know *she* would have felt it so—an approach to the unseen is not so much startling as soothing and solemnizing, amidst the quick succession of passing excitements in a busy world. At any rate this is true, that my dear brother, who is a business-like, sensible Englishman—if ever there was one—has been quite as much impressed by it as I am myself. To us, of course, who love the old people and the old place—but I think also to others who love to catch a glimpse of the life of the Past—the mere picture of this year or two of my mother's girlish days must have an attraction all its own.

I may perhaps add, in order to make

things more clearly intelligible, that in accordance with a clause in the original patent, on my grandfather's death my mother succeeded to the title and estates of Ravensthorpe as Countess in her own right, and my brother has since become her successor.

My father also, while retaining his own title as Baronet, had my mother's family name prefixed to his own, and I—who have succeeded to my father's property—have borne, and indeed bear the courtesy title belonging to the daughter of an Earl. Oddly enough—as if prophetically of what was to happen—provision for all this, where not made in the original patent, was found in an *addendum* dating from the time of King Charles II. So the king was pleased to command.

DOROTHY HOLT MASHAM.

MY mother's MS. with my additions runs as follows :—

I.

THE old Hall at Ravensthorpe stands to-day almost exactly as it stood three centuries ago. Modern improvements have of course been introduced in matters of detail, but in the main the old place is as it was when its owners fought long ago in the Wars of the Roses, and—in the less distant years of the Great Rebellion—in the cause of the king.

The house occupies almost three sides of a quadrangle ; *almost*, for the northern wing is shorter than that which runs parallel to it on the south. On the fourth side there stretches an antique paling of metal-work, and this is carried on at right angles to meet the northern wing, and so, in a way, to complete what is wanting in

its length, and thus to make it match the opposite building.

In the centre of the quadrangle so formed is a plot of smooth green grass, and this again is centred by a basin in which there is a continual plash of falling water from a stone pipe which opens beneath the feet of a gigantic figure of a warrior—carved also in stone—who stands grasping in his right hand a club, and holding in his left a shield surmounted with a raven with wings partly spread, and encircled with a motto in the French language—the arms of the house of Ravensthorpe.

Behind the Hall are stately trees, and in the foreground greensward, where some of the deer make a home, and then on one side rise hills covered with bent and tufts of ling, which trend upward to the distant stretches of the moors; while on

the other, from a bend in the coast, they terminate in threatening headlands above the sea. But in front there is an expanse of park, with groups of trees here and there, and, towards the right, far-extending woods; while on the left the house is sheltered by a smaller copse, beyond which lies the Parish Church, which has from time immemorial, until quite recently, served the purpose also of private chapel to the family. This venerable building is surrounded by a graveyard, rich in tombs of many periods, and in gnarled and troubled yew-trees, and the graveyard again is itself protected by a low moss-grown wall.

Nothing can exceed the beauty of the view in front,—of smooth grass, and then wilder ground, and then glades of oak, rich with undergrowth of bracken—tall and green in the spring time, and russet in the autumn, browsed by herds of timid deer,—

which stretches away beyond the broad terraces of quaint flower-beds and yew walks immediately fronting the Hall. Beyond the deer forest, however, and to the south-east, the country becomes level and uninteresting, and stretches in dreary flats to the sea. As the crow flies the distance is not more than a few miles from the great front door across the marsh to the coast-line, and the trees have an ominous bend westward which tells of the easterly winds in spring and in winter; and the “sea frets”—as the people call the fogs which roll up from the east—though they really fertilize the meadow grass, carry with them a taste of the salt waves.

On the left, looking from the fronting windows, the coast trends inland, and only a few hundred yards beyond the church the surf breaks with a hissing sound on a stretch of sand, and the waves

sob and swell against a flanking barrier, half rock, half marl.

The church itself stands really within the boundary of the park. In its present condition it dates from the close of the 15th and opening of the 16th century. It seems to have been half private chapel, half collegiate church in its first intention. The nave and flanking aisles are comparatively short, and their roofing much lower than the choir. *It* is deep and lofty and splendid. The roof is of groined stone; the immense windows which light it from above are filled with ancient glass, in which the ranks of angels shine out in heavenly vestments, and at their feet are shields and arms of the "forebears" of the family. The eastern window is of the richest tracery, and the subjects of the glass have been evidently chosen with care to commemorate the various saintly persons who

have illustrated the Church's life in this part of England.

Beneath the window and behind the high altar the eastern wall is rich with a wealth of angels under canopies of exquisite workmanship. In the centre a crucifix in brass is let into the stone, and the angels immediately around it bear the emblems of the Passion or the symbols of the Sacrament, and right and left of all these groups are tiers of bishops and abbots in cope and mitre, and bearing the pastoral staff.

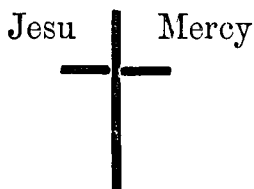
How all these escaped the iconoclastic fanaticism of the Puritans it is hard to say; but this is certain, that they remain almost in their primitive delicacy and beauty to the present hour.

To the south of the chancel is a chantry. In this there is also an altar which either escaped the fanatics, or was restored

again by one of the lords of Ravensthorpe, and in the chantry also are splendid windows, displaying figures of the Great Archangel and the warrior Saints, and the tender and blessed Angels of the Passion and Resurrection, bearing scrolls which carry verses of comfort and hope, chosen from the old offices of the Church, in relation to the blessed dead.

Of these, many generations—all of the house of Ravensthorpe—rest in the vault below; and sepulchral slabs laid into the pavement, and crosses, or flat plates of brass fastened in the walls, record their names. There are, however, in the chantry but three monumental tombs. Of these, one lies close in on the south-eastern corner, and another in the corresponding corner, north-east, the altar standing between them.

They are remarkable tombs ; both are covered with flat smooth slabs of purbeck marble, and on the face of the slab in each case is the simple, touching, and unusual inscription—



Pray for the repose of this poor soul.

Round the slanting edge of each is the record of name and date of death. On the tomb north of the altar, the inscription informs us that “ Here lyeth the bodye of the Ladye Dorothy, daughter of Roger Mashame, third Earl of Arkworth, who departed this life in the year of our Lord God, MDCLII., aged XIX. years. Kinswoman (so it is added) of the house of

Ravensthorpe." On the corresponding slab is an inscription of later date, but, *mutatis mutandis*, precisely similar, which bears the record of "Sir Everard Holt Banneret, Lord of the Manor of Ravensthorpe, who departed this life in the year of our Lord God, MDCLIII., aged xxv. years."

The third tomb is more modern and very different. It is a magnificent monumental tomb. The sides of the vertical slabs are filled in with coats-of-arms of the house of Ravensthorpe and kindred families, and on the horizontal slab is the figure of a lady, exquisitely carved in white marble. She lies in splendid folding robes, with a face of benign beauty and serenity, worn with lines of furrowing care, and with an expression of tender melancholy. The

hands are folded on the breast, and beneath them is a plain broad cross. The tomb is overshadowed by a glorious arch, and protected by a grille of elaborate metal-work, which guards it on the chancel side and forms a barrier between it and the choir of the church. It lies considerably to the west of the altar, and at several feet from the altar-steps. This tomb is named in the inscription as that of the Lady Dorothy Agnes, third Countess of Ravensthorpe.

II.

THIS third tomb is the tomb of my mother.

I who tell this strange story, am the sole surviving child of my father, third Earl of Ravensthorpe, and of Dorothy Agnes his wife. My only brother died in

infancy, but my father's family has ever had the privilege of remainder in the female line.

My mother is my earliest and always my dearest memory. I write of the time when I was sixteen years of age, but she had gone to her rest some seven or eight years before.

My father had loved my mother with the most tender affection. When she died I was far too young to know with what unchanging grief he was destined to journey on alone to his grave; but this I know, that during these seven or eight years of his widowed life, while he had proved himself the tenderest of fathers, he had been practically a broken-hearted man. I had dim recollections of a gayer life in the old Hall before my dear mother's death; but since that solemn day when, in

my mourning dress, I stood clasping my father's hand by her grave, our life at Ravensthorpe had been generally quiet and secluded in the extreme.

My father had paid short visits to London to attend to his parliamentary duties, and relatives had from time to time visited us in the days when the gardens were in their summer beauty, and again, not seldom, at Michaelmas, and often in the winter about Christmastide; but for the most part we had been alone. My governess had left us two years before the date of my story, and since then my father had spent several morning hours daily in helping me with my studies, and in the evening hours had loved to hear me play to him on the piano in the drawing-room, or on the organ in the chapel—for now we had a tiny but beautiful chapel *in*

the Hall, where daily morning prayers were said.

He himself was no despicable performer on the pianoforte, and often accompanied me on my violin. I believe young ladies nowadays pay more attention to that unrivalled instrument, but in those days such proficiency was not so common. I had learnt it so long that I had no remembrance of the beginning, and in many a lonely hour of life it has been my dearest companion and friend. I remember well how my father threw his whole soul into the duets we played together,—the tender melodies of Mozart and the pathetic harmonies of Spohr.

My other chief companions were my dear dog Cogser (a name of home manufacture), a collie of the Highland breed, sensitive, gifted and loving, as those creatures are, and my horse—a nervous,

high-spirited little mare—whom I called Hedwig, after the heroine of a German romance which my father and I had read together during a short visit to Dresden.

That short visit and the better part of a winter in Rome when I was only nine years old, comprised my foreign experience. My father had taken pains with my German and Italian, for he had always been a student, and much devoted to foreign literature, and indeed in these later years he had spent much of the day and, I think, most of the night in his library.

The people on my father's estate were, I think, a happy people. As I grew from ten to sixteen I had gradually learnt from him the view he strongly held and always taught me, that whatever any of us may appear to have, there is in fact nothing *our own*, and especially that a

great landed proprietor with many dependants really *possesses* nothing himself, but is a tenant at will, and only an administrator for Almighty God, holding an office which requires him to dispense what is placed in his hands for the benefit of those who depend upon him, and for the discharge of which he must one day render a strict account. This lesson I have been grateful for all my life. I think in later years it has helped me, and one very dear to me, to do our duty, and I believe that, on the whole, it is the sense of this which has made the English gentry and aristocracy a real blessing to our dear country.

Among the regular visitors at Ravens-thorpe were one or two persons of whom I must say a word in passing.

My aunt Miriam was my father's elder sister. She was a maiden lady, and to me,

from my earliest days, she appeared always to be old. She had been, in her younger days, much about Court, and had stately and courtly ways. She was at all times splendidly dressed, and her inexhaustible varieties of gowns, ever with a touch of the antique about them, were to me objects of awe and admiration. In these later years she always walked with a handsome gold-headed ebony stick, sat bolt upright, and disdained any assistance, only that I had found out that over our slippery oak floors she never refused my arm, which therefore was always at her service. Some people thought her severe, and, if they spoke to her, feared a snub. I am bound to acknowledge she had the trick of being at times somewhat contradictory; but she was a noble old soul, she hated hypocrisy or pretence in any

shape, and could endure pain without a wince.

I loved Aunt Miriam, and I knew she loved me ; though anything like effusion, or what in these times is called “gush,” she would have treated with withering scorn. I used to think she had been “born out of due time” and had missed her opportunity ; for had she only been in the days when it was fashionable for noble ladies to die on the scaffold, she would have played her part with a stately grace such as to do honour to the occasion, and would have made the people dip their handkerchiefs in her blood, and her executioner feel thoroughly repentant and ashamed of himself. In her unbending moments she called my father “my Lord,” but in softer hours she spoke to him as “Ravensthorpe,” with a tender

look in her dear old eyes that spoke volumes of her love and devotion. I noticed also that my father she never contradicted. He was the head of her house, and to attribute error to him she would have deemed an act of black and degrading treason. In this, I confess I cordially agreed with her; indeed I think every one held the same opinion. I suppose it was an almost universal belief because he in no way shared it himself, but was always so sweet and patient and reasonable. But why I loved Aunt Miriam most, I think, was because she so entirely loved my mother.

“There was never any one like your mother, child,” she used to say; “she was the sweetest, the cleverest, the most beautiful woman I ever saw,” and then

she would add a saying which possessed me with a strong fascination: "I think," she was fond of saying, "there were always angels in attendance on your mother."

On two points Aunt Miriam was wont to unbend—not as to her back, for that was always in the perpendicular,—indeed I used to fancy she must sleep in a sitting or standing posture—but I mean morally. She loved three rubbers of whist, neither less nor more, and always believed that if she were beaten, either her partner was under-educated, or there was some secret unfairness; unless, indeed, my father played against her, and then she was almost venomous if she were victorious. Another trait: when at Ravensthorpe, she liked every afternoon to drive for two hours. She said there was no neighbourhood so really beautiful, and that she

loved to enjoy the country. I was often her companion in these drives, and I knew that as a matter of fact she always went fast asleep within a few yards of the great gates, and woke up only when we again reached the door. I never dared to hint at such a thing. And the only approach to duplicity which I ever noticed in Aunt Miriam was, that when I told incidents of our drive to my father at dinner, she guarded a stately silence. Only once do I remember that she made any remark in our drives. Once the coachman pulled up suddenly to spare a young woman who *ran* across the horses' heads, and then she observed with great severity, "Young ladies don't comport themselves nowadays, child, as they used to do when *I* was young. Your mother would never have done *that*." I re-

member laughing inwardly at this. The notion of my dear mother, whom I knew only as a sweet and graceful vision, or in the calm repose of her monumental tomb, *running*, tickled my imagination so acutely !

Dear Aunt Miriam ! she was a beautiful old lady. With all her unbending ways, she was so true, so kind. She was what is called “game to the backbone,” but her heart was in the right place, and that is, after all, the great thing in this sad world ! She always seemed to me about a hundred, and now for many years she has slept the sleep of the just under the chantry floor. May she rest in peace !

Our other chronic visitors in summer and at Christmas were Eleanor Hordle, the sister of a late vicar, good and kind and commonplace, but really devoted to the

clothing-club and the poor; and then there was a certain Miss Marjoribanks, who I believe had been a "companion," or something, in my mother's family, and a certain Miss Marjory Blackwood, who had a small property of her own about twenty miles from Ravensthorpe, and had always been a friend of our people.

Miss Marjoribanks was an almost incessant talker, and I used to think her fellow-"companion" must have been deaf to have endured her constant company. She always bored me dreadfully, but there was a mitigating circumstance; however much she talked no one was expected to listen, and no one ever tried, I think, except my dear father, and he could not fail in courtesy to the most tiresome person in the world.

"Poor thing," I have sometimes heard

him say, when Miss Marjoribanks had withdrawn at night to give her maid the benefit of her eloquence, "she has a great gift of utterance." This was the most severe thing I ever heard my dear father say.

Miss Marjory was a good soul, but she certainly was not brilliant. She always gave the wrong answer, and possessed a faculty of confusion of thought which amounted to genius. I was often sorry for her, though she made me laugh, for she roused Aunt Miriam's opposition more than any one, and I am bound to say got severely snubbed in consequence on every possible occasion. She had a good-humoured way of winking at her next neighbour on these occasions, and ejaculating, *sotto voce*, "Poor Lady Miriam, it's her way, you know"

This threw me into interior and un-

quenchable laughter, but outward expression was always checked by my father, who had a merry twinkle in his eye at such times, which implied to me his deep sympathy with my feelings, but his sense of the need of courteous self-restraint. I liked Miss Marjory, she was so good-natured and so funny—always *mal à propos*. She invariably played the wrong card at whist, which reduced Aunt Miriam to speechless scorn.

I forgot one trait in Miss Marjoribanks—she loved games. People who allow themselves in an unrestrained enthusiasm for this particular taste, are sometimes, I have noticed, socially most embarrassing; and indeed so she often was. When her efforts in this direction were successfully resisted, she had a way of trying what she considered the next best thing. Then she

would make vigorous endeavours to force every one to discover impossible puzzles, or to swing sixpences on strings to strike the hour against tumblers, or she would proceed to propose riddles. In this latter case you were saved all overstrain of the brain-power, for she invariably told the answer before you had time to hear the question, with the rhetorical interrogative, "Now, isn't that good?"

The worst was, she sometimes excited Miss Marjory to emulation in conundrums, and then *she* invariably asked the answer, and then, with a puzzled look, would say, "No, let me see now—no! that isn't it? Is it? Now, let me see! what was it *though*?" with such an appealing look that I often fairly exploded in laughter, until I was reduced to better behaviour by my dear father's "My child, my child," accom-

panied with a smile of such exquisite amusement that I knew it was only his imperturbable good manners which kept him from following my example.

Others came, many gentlemen, old and young, and the house was occasionally very full, but only for about a week at a time, especially about Michaelmas, when the Festival was kept at the church, and there was much festivity, and our services were beautiful and solemn.

The hounds sometimes met at Ravens-thorpe, and I loved to see the high-mettled horses, and the men in their pink, and to hear the baying of the dogs. I rode on these occasions on Hedwig to the meet with my father. I never hunted. He did not think it a fit amusement for women, and he himself, though he took a kind of interest in it all, had never

crossed country since my sweet mother's death.

It was a very happy home, although, or perhaps *because*, for the greater part of the year we were very quiet, I and my father quite alone.

These were the times I loved the best. In spite of his quiet ways, my father was ever to me the most delightful of companions. Our Dante, our music, my lonely rides and walks, and my walks and rides with him, and many visits to the poor people, and little talks to the dear old Vicar—my father's oldest and most faithful friend,—and solitary hours in the chantry, where I loved in the evening to spend some time by my mother's grave, and some curious wanderings in the less-inhabited parts of the old Hall—these things made up my quiet life for some eight or ten years.

III.

I HAVE had to mention the lonely hours in the church and in the silent rooms, in order that several incidents in my story, and especially its strange close, may be rightly understood. For it is to the close, as I think, that these incidents lead, and these are the facts which will make many things clear to you, and these incidents and that close are certainly strange. To me they have cleared up many mysteries, as far as mysteries may be cleared this side the veil. Certainly the close brought me happiness unspeakable; but, beyond that personal joy, it has ever seemed to open a fresh view of the highest and most blessed thing given to poor

mortals in common with those whom Death can never touch, in common even with that Being of Beings who stands above us all.

I have often thought that if our soul's ears could be closed to the little babbling voices which make a babel of mere noise in this world, and if at the same time our heart's affections could be wide awake, we might hear music of blinding beauty ever sounding in the spirit world in which we truly live, so near us as it is, and yet, alas ! so far away ! Once or twice my ears and eyes were open, and the babel died to silence. Once or twice I heard and saw ! But enough ! My story—

The south wing of Ravensthorpe, somehow, was not much inhabited. My father and I lived for the most part in the line of buildings which united the two wings.

There was our dining-room, with a wealth of western sunlight, and then—opening out of it—the small breakfast-room where we sometimes dined also, when quite alone. In the north wing—the shorter one—was an entrance-hall (the *great* entrance-hall was in the south wing), and above it looking to the churchyard and the sea, my sitting-room and bedroom; and—in a passage parallel to the hall—a door into the library, where my father mostly lived, and, at the end, a door into the conservatory, from which again another door opened on the gravel walk, which led through the little wood of pines and birches to the churchyard gate. From my own windows—and this I loved—I could catch a glimpse of the far-expanding sea.

I tell you this because, as you know,

there have been some slight changes ; but thus it was when I was still a girl.

You will notice, then, how far we usually were from the great south wing.

I loved the south wing, all the same, chiefly because it was so silent, and gave me space for many dreams ; and dreams, when they are not maudlin or unhealthy, are another name for thoughts of the ideal, and wanderings in the mystical, that is, the *real* world.

What I loved most in the south wing was the gallery. It ran almost from end to end. I think there is not another such in England. On one side, at either end, were deep huge fireplaces, and at the other large bay windows. At the one end was a window, fit to stand above the altar of a great cathedral, with rich tracery in stone, and plain clear glass ; clear, except

where above, the light was broken by coloured coats of arms. But you know this. It is just the same to-day.

There were many portraits in the gallery ;—knights and barons and noble ladies ; and some more sacred ; but above all were two I loved. They hung opposite each other. One represented a tall and graceful girl, with a fair face of strange and fascinating sweetness, of blonde beauty, and with large blue eyes, and lips red as the juice of the cherry, and the head crowned with masses of golden hair. This was a modern portrait. The figure was clad in a flowing robe of white, and at the feet was a sleeping spaniel, and by the side were flowers,—the passion-flower, the trailing clematis, the rose—and behind, a landscape, with a church tower and the sea,—which any one at once

could perceive was the scenery of Ravens-thorpe.

This was my mother's picture.

At this I could gaze for hours, and always felt towards it as poor Cowper felt, as though it made her live again to draw out love and tears.

There was something in this portrait firm and strong and tender, but oh! so sad! It seemed to me as though it had the peace and beauty of another life, with a touch of tender sadness for some sorrow not exclusively her own, known fully only in another world.

The picture opposite was wholly different. They said it was a Vandyke. The background showed the battlements and deep protruding windows of the old Hall of Ravensthorpe, but in the foreground were two figures. One represented

a young man of some three or four and twenty years. He wore the picturesque and attractive dress of the Cavaliers. His hair was dark and curling, and his frame was strong; a troubled look was on his face, which was noble and handsome, the eyes were downcast, and the long lashes almost lay along the cheeks. The other was the figure of a girl of some seventeen summers. I dare not attempt to describe it. It was most beautiful. The dress was of the same period, quaint and stately and strange, in lace and satin; the eyes were somewhat downcast too, but not so downcast that you could not see their blue, nor fail to notice in them a yearning love and deep pathetic sadness. The hair was in abundant masses, and it was golden brown. The girl's hands were locked in those of the man with the strength of passionate

resolve, but what was strange was this, they did not look at one another, for the faces were turned away. If Vandyke indeed was the painter, he never painted anything more beautiful. I don't know why, but somehow these two pictures seemed always to lift me into another world. Some pictures seem to me mere rough and partial statements of isolated facts, while others contain endless and most moving suggestions as being summaries of some touching history. For a real portrait is surely not a mere delineation of feature or of form, but the record—under the guise of such sensible symbols—of a struggling soul. And indeed no histories, of all the many which men have written, can be so full of pathos and instruction as would be—if we could attain to the knowledge of it—the *real* story of a human soul.

These pictures somehow set me thinking of such things, and of them in their wider reach of really boundless life, not merely in *this* part of it which Time confines, but in the whole of it, both in and out of the accidents of mortality.

I connected the old south wing with these pictures, and they with it, and, in my imagination, peopled the room to match their possible meaning. For I had, when I gazed upon them, dim thoughts of the way in which one life must affect others, and how impossible it is for any of us in life simply to act alone ; and further, I think, of the mysterious way in which acts done in this short mortal pilgrimage live in their consequences not only far beyond the grave in the actors' history, but here too in the histories of those whom their actions may affect.

Now these thoughts were, of course, only vague and indeterminate until some incidents occurred which gave them something of form in my mind, and induced me to try to unravel the mystery which I felt, half-consciously, brooded over the subjects of such pictures.

You will not be surprised, after what I have said, when I tell you further that in those days Ravensthorpe was said to be "haunted." Most old houses get a reputation, perhaps, of this sort, but the reputation of Ravensthorpe was of long standing and well established. I often used to think of this, and wonder what it exactly meant and why it was.

This took strong hold upon me, partly, I suppose, because I was a good deal alone, and also because the south wing was so seldom inhabited that its quietude and

solemnity, and something more, as I shall presently tell you, lent an air of probability to the general belief.

Partly, however, my constant thoughts on the subject were due to my father. There was generally about him an air of sadness and quiet that somehow helped my thoughts on such a subject. And yet, especially alone with me, he had—like all natures gifted with wide and generous sympathies—a fund of humour, and indeed a vein of pure and healthy fun. No man more than my father was quick to see the humorous side of things, and ready in the enjoyment of it. Thinking of him, I can't but think the deepest, purest, even gravest characters, are also the swiftest in sympathy with startling strands of humour which are interwoven with our sad and mysterious life. People

gain a *tone*, it seems to me, from those they live with which is quite as natural to them, and acts upon them quite as strongly and unconsciously as the air they breathe. My father and I were also all in all to each other, and we were very like in one way, we were both over-mastered by sensitive reserve. I can't but fancy that where reserved people are so much to each other as we were, they are constantly thinking the same kind of thoughts, and at least half conscious that so it is, though they very seldom give them words. Of course I did not think of all this then, but retracing the past in my older years, it has come to me with strong conviction.

Besides all this, there were many things which we read together, which all tended the same way. My dear father was—as I have said—a great student, and loved

his books. He loved them, as such men do, as dear and familiar companions ; and, by the way, what I now think so beautiful in him was this, that his deep love and veneration for the dead, who could only speak to him from the shelves of his library, never made him in the least degree regardless of his duties to the living.

Then not only did he take great pains with my studies, but when anything was specially dear to him among his beloved books, he had a way of sharing it with me.

It was in this way that I came to make acquaintance with many writers not usually read—at least in those days—by girls of my age, I think. Among them especially, I learnt to love such as discussed mysterious things about Death and the Soul, and another life ; and chiefly, among others—

not to speak of our dear and great Dante—I have a vivid recollection of Wordsworth’s sublime Ode on the “Intimations of Immortality,” with all the wonderful things he says about our birth being “but a sleep and a forgetting.”

With my father, too, I read the *Phædo*, and I often liked to think over in my quiet walks, how Socrates felt that the Good might well hope to gain in the other world the greatest good, and that in dying he felt sure that he was going to live with the Gods, who were “the best of masters;” and I liked often to say to myself, that God is “our guardian, and that we are part of His property.”

I do not think that all this made me foolish or dreamy, but that, I suppose, was really due to the goodness and love of my dear father.

Be all this as it may, I do know that I never thought of the old house being haunted as a very dreadful or at all an unnatural thing. I suppose I had grown up with the idea, and it was only part of myself, and I felt, in the unspoken way which I have mentioned, that in this my father and I were quite of one mind.

It was not merely that people believed that the house was haunted, but they thought that certain parts of the park, and one in particular, shared the same distinction. But about this I will tell you presently.

I used sometimes to speculate why "old houses," and "old families," should most usually have such beliefs attached to them. Perhaps it may be that the spirits who are gone are most closely attached to the living,

in cases where there has been a reverence for that fund of spiritual history which is called "tradition," and where the threads of that mystic bond have not been so lightly severed as they are wont to be with people who possess no record of their ancestors, and care nothing about those from whom they come.

Well, all this kind of thing, I suppose, helped me to think of unseen beings haunting Ravensthorpe as a thing most natural, and not causing me any fear, but only a sweet and reverent sense of awe.

And now I must tell you how first I came to know as a fact, what for long I had believed in without any actual evidence.

V.

I HAVE said that some parts of the grounds of Ravensthorpe, as well as the old Hall itself, were said to be haunted.

There was one place especially which had this reputation, and here I had my first experience of a singularly strange contact with the Unseen.

Immediately to the south of the old south wing, and beyond the limit of the terraced gardens, there were some buildings which had once been a part of an even older mansion, but in later times formed a portion of a stable-yard, and furnished homes for some of the grooms and their families. Here too was a sort of poultry-yard, where Ephraim—an old retainer, and now our poultry-man—reared innumerable

families of ducks and chickens. On a grassy open in front he had a number of hutches for his broods, and often in the spring mornings or evenings, I loved to be with him at feeding time. Beyond this was a thick and tangled shrubbery, through which ran a walk with a low wooden gate at either end. By the side of the shrubbery ran the oldest avenue in Ravensthorpe, lined with venerable oaks and tall feathery elms, and ancient and gigantic pines where the winds sighed mournfully on autumn nights, and which ended far away down a steep hill at one of the further gates of the park.

Just across the avenue, where it skirted the higher part of the shrubbery, was a broad white gate, which opened into an open sloping field. If you crossed the field by a well-trodden footpath, you came

on a little gate at the bottom, leading into a wild and tangled wood. In spring time this wood was loud with the varying voices of many birds, and as the year went on the ground was carpetted with a wealth of wild flowers. As the wood fell away steeply into the hollow below, a stile at the end of a confused and winding path led to a corner of a neighbouring field, and just across this corner, not a hundred yards from the stile, was a little bridge leading over a rushing brook, which skirted the lower line of the wood, and fled away through distant pastures far beyond the park, to find the close of its wanderings in the sea. In summer this was a mere babbling brook on a pebbly bottom; but in spring and winter, and in autumn sometimes, after heavy rain, it rushed with the fury of a considerable torrent.

The stream we called—I don't know why—"The Kantlin," and the bridge was called "The Spirit's Bridge."

I don't think the strongest man among all our people would have crossed that bridge, for any bribe, after nightfall, and indeed I imagine not one among them but would willingly have plunged to his neck in the stream above or below it, rather than go dry-shod along its narrow planks, when the day was fading into dusky twilight.

Beyond the stream were scattered farmsteads, inhabited by tenant farmers on my father's property.

Now so it happened, that the wife of a farm labourer working for one of our best farmers, who rented a farm about a mile across the stream, fell ill.

I often visited our people, for I loved

to be among the poor. I always found that their marvellous patience and tender grateful kindness, made me feel the duties and sorrows of life more deeply ; and theirs was such a real world of trial, it was very sweet to help them. I had somehow learnt to think one of the sweetest sayings of our Saviour for us all was this, “ Sick and ye visited Me.” I think this was because my father was himself so kind to all his people, but especially in their times of sickness.

Mrs. Bowen—that was the poor woman’s name—had had a little baby ; a little, soft, pretty, impossible creature. It was the youngest of three, and the poor mother was too ill to take half the care of it that was needed, or any care at all of its little brother and sister. I loved to go and nurse the little helpless thing, and take

something from our housekeeper to the poor mother, and for the use of the other little ones.

My companion on these occasions—when I could not succeed in escaping without her—was my maid McQuoid. She was called “my maid,” now that I had attained an age of such dignity as to begin to need one, but she had been with my mother, and had always been more like a nurse to me. She possessed all the privileges which attach to a faithful nurse, and these she was noway slow to assert upon occasion.

McQuoid was a Scottish woman, and in spite of all the devotion of my family to the English Church, she was to the last in heart and soul a Presbyterian. All the same, from long habit I suppose, she really loved our beautiful church and venerated the good old Vicar. “His words,

my Leddie," she used to say, "are indeed to edificâtion, and I just close my eyes to his superstitious ceremōnies." She held strongly that the Stuart Kings were "ungodly tyrants," and thought the only weaknesses observable in "My Lord" and "My Leddie" were their traditional attachment to "King Charles the Martyr." She and I had some amusing controversies on this subject, but I don't know that I ever succeeded in converting her. Like all Scottish people whom I have ever met, McQuoid was unboundedly superstitious; if indeed superstition means limitless belief in all sorts of processes of, and relations with, an unseen world which have no ground in reason or evidence, and which are accompanied with really overwhelming fear.

I have often wondered why the strong Scottish people are so superstitious, and

I suppose it is that the human spirit demands some contact with unseen presences, and as these good people have thrown aside the Catholic Faith, they are forced to find substitutes for its teaching in their own imaginations. I may be wrong in this, and I hope I am not uncharitable, I owe them too much not to make me shrink from such a danger, for indeed I have a deep and unalterable love for Scotland. I only here record my own rude thoughts. However that may be, McQuoid believed in every conceivable power of another world, always—it seemed to me—possessed of most malign influence over us poor mortals. Well, this dear McQuoid, as I have said, was not seldom my companion in my visits to the sick, and especially on these particular occasions to my friend Mrs. Bowen and her little child.

Now it so happened that I had set out rather late one afternoon, at the very beginning of this September, and McQuoid with me, to go to Bowen's cottage. The day had been crisp and bright, and the gold of the turning leaves shone with unwonted brilliance in the autumn sunlight. We had a pleasant walk and were in the highest spirits, but we found the poor woman unusually ailing, and so I dawdled on and left unusually late. I dawdled on, but not without remonstrance from my faithful McQuoid. As it began to grow dusk she became extremely uneasy, and at last stoutly maintained that we should be home too late and his Lordship would be in anxiety, and that we must go.

I thought McQuoid unnecessarily and unusually fidgety, but I did not like to

vex the good old soul, and so, with many blessings poured upon us as usual by our humble friend, we set out on our return. The distance was really nothing from the Hall, so that I had been wondering at McQuoid's uneasiness, until, as we turned through a gate at the head of the sloping field through which a path led to the brook and the valley, we saw the Kantlin tumbling and foaming below "The Spirit's Bridge." Then McQuoid fairly pulled up in real distress. "Oh, my bairn," she said (and she never called me her "bairn" unless she was in trouble), "it's unco' late to cross the Kantlin; wae's me! they do say there's them at the Bridge, 'specially on a September evening, that are no' canny for honest folk to meet;" "and they've got to do wi' the family," she added in a horrified whisper; "and what

should the like o' me say to his Lordship if ony mischief were to come to your Leddieship."

"Dear McQuoid," I said, "don't be foolish, I daresay that's all talk, and anyhow, God and His angels take care of us, I'm certain; and if I *am* ever frightened, I am always sure my mother's spirit is watching over and praying for me."

We went on in silence. I did feel awe-struck somehow, and more so as we went on. The path on which we were, wound down the hill amid furze bushes and clumps of heather, and before we had gone many paces along it, somehow I felt as if I was being borne on by a crowd. There was nothing to be seen, and there was no unpleasant crowding or pressure, but we had the feeling of being among those who go with a measured tread and onward march,

and that among them, it would be impossible to pause.

As for McQuoid, I don't know exactly what she felt, for she, like myself, kept silence; only that once or twice I heard her behind me murmuring under her breath, "God ha' mercy, it's uncanny anyhow!"

So we wound down the hill. "We," I say, for although certainly nothing was to be seen and nothing heard, I had no doubt whatever that we were forming a part of some strange cavalcade.

Now, too, I began to feel an extraordinary chill in the air. It was not merely cold, it was icy, and the very touch of it on one's hand and cheek was chill with that hopeless, unchanging coldness which we feel when we touch the dead. Onward we marched in solemn silence. For me, I seemed to be moving side by

side with another whom yet I saw not, and McQuoid had somehow fallen behind and was also going with a steady movement, as if she too had fallen into her place in the procession.

As we neared the bridge, it seemed to me that in moving onwards I must walk straight into the tormented torrent; and yet I could not step aside, so regular was the march of the procession, so steady the pressure from behind, that there seemed no choice but to go forward at whatever cost.

Just as I reached the water's edge, and where one step more would have been a step into the stream, some one from behind made me pause; strong hands seemed to clasp me, and lift me gently but irresistibly, and bear me before my rescuer, safe across the narrow bridge. Then there

was a pause. I was placed at one side out of the procession, which appeared to be passing by me, and McQuoid was by my side. I had a strong, unaccountable desire to move onwards, and my mind was overwhelmed with a sense of mysterious sorrow; but the strong and gentle hands were holding me firmly, and I fancied I heard words spoken to me in tones so thin and aerial I could scarcely catch them, but some words did reach me, and they were these, "Be faithful, be true."

I have said that I had seen nothing, but now I saw

It was a funeral procession. They were winding up the opposite hill now, and filing past me over the bridge. Dim and strange they were, but still distinct. I am sure I saw them. In front were men who looked like halberdiers, with quaint

caps of past days' fashion, and in their hands tall maces, like those in our entrance hall; then came many men like servants, and women in mourning robes; then came the dead. The dead! do I say? how strange! they must all have been what we call "dead!" Well, anyhow, then came what I must call "the body." It was the funeral evidently of a lady of rank. There was certainly an open bier, for though a pall was thrown across which seemed to wave in the wind, I saw the pale still face, and I saw the white hands folded across the breast. I remember now, though it did not strike me then, that I had no consciousness of McQuoid being near me any longer, nor of the stretch of park or the neighbouring wood, nor of the ordinary dusk of the September evening.

I was conscious only of the solemn procession, clearly seen, though in what light I know not. All down the line were men with flaring torches, but though the torches seemed to flare and blaze, they cast no glow that I remember, but were rather like the torches in a picture. What moved me to unspeakable compassion, was the figure of a man who immediately followed the bier. He was tall and well built, and noble looking. He was clad in a suit of sable, and his arms were folded, and his head was bent forward low upon his breast. He seemed to walk with firm and determined tread, but though I could not see his face, I never saw a form which impressed me so, by every movement, with a sense of anguish and despair. The tears sprang to my eyes, and my whole heart ached for him in sorrow, and I think I should have rushed

forward to him to say a word of comfort, but the hands that had lifted me held me fast, and again I thought I heard the voice, "Be true, be faithful," and I could only weep for him and wonder. Just behind him moved a stately dame, with a look of such cruel triumph and such defiant scorn, it made me tremble. But oh! all other feelings were swallowed up in sorrow for the dead, and him who moved behind her. I was sure I heard a sound of a dirge now thin and distant, borne upon the wind, and as I gazed and listened, I found myself whispering, "Lord, have mercy. Grant them, O Lord, eternal rest." With measured, soundless tread, they journeyed up the hill towards the broad avenue leading to the church: the torches seemed to flare and flicker, dimly I caught a sound of muffled bells, and then the whole

procession appeared to sway about as if blown by the breeze till forms became formless, and what had been so clear, though ghostly, melted into the half light of the dying day. I started and found myself standing by McQuoid. Poor McQuoid ! I could see that she was as pale as a ghost !

“It was a funeral procession,” I said at last ; “you could see that, McQuoid, plainly. “And oh ! I am so sorry for *him*, the one who moved behind.”

“Don’t talk like that, my bairn,” she answered ; “I could *see* nothing, but I *felt* them (Lord have mercy on me !) and they’re no canny company for honest folk !”

Poor old soul, she hurried me on to the wood, and I could feel that she was trembling all over and hardly able to get

on. At last she broke out with the cheering observation,—

“I’m sure I hope it bodes no ill to your Leddieship ; I think it would make his Lordship very uneasy to know.”

“I shall not tell my father,” I said ; “not just yet, at any rate,” and I thought it well not to tell McQuoid any more of what I had really seen. I felt I could not then speak of it to any one. It had a meaning, I was sure, and a meaning for *me*. Somehow or other, I knew not how, *I* had some duty towards these sorrowing spirits, —towards the dead who mourned the dead. I had too a happy sense of protection. I felt sure an angel had guided me across the Kantlin and kept me from following where I ought not, and detained me to hear and see what concerned, in some hidden way, my duty ; it seemed very

awful and mysterious, but I felt nothing like fear.

How glad dear old McQuoid was when we got out of the gloomy wood and reached the Hall. The light did seem so strong and sturdy when the door was opened ! And Cogser came bounding out to meet me, and leaping over me and licking my face and hands, with that sweet unflagging affection which the dear dumb things have to those they love.

“ My Cogsie ! ” I said, “ was him very glad to see his mistress ? I ’ m glad you weren ’ t with me, dear, it would have frightened you, my beauty, and put your hair on end and spoilt your winter coat ! ” This was nonsense ; but I do think the dumb creatures have sometimes a mysterious and quick and awe-stricken sense of another life. Is it that they are

truer than we are to such light as is given them? or is it that the sadness of another world touches them merely because they have no share in immortality? I hope not. At least I think I should always love to have Cogsie with me even in heaven.

Then I ran up to dress for dinner. My father and I spent our usual peaceful evening, only I couldn't help humming over, and then strumming on my violin, Mendelssohn's beautiful air, "For He shall give His angels charge over thee," and—in thought of that poor, sorrow-laden spirit—Spohr's "Blest are the departed," and going to bed that night I think I prayed more earnestly than ever for all in sorrow, and especially I added a prayer for the souls of those whom I had seen.

VI.

It was a day or two after this—for indeed I remember distinctly almost every hour of that September—that my father told me I must leave my own bedroom for a night or two as the workmen were coming in to re-lay some of the oaken planks in the floor, near which some of the joists seemed to be giving way.

He told me to give the housekeeper directions as to what room I would take for the nonce, and wished me at once to make the change, so that all work might be finished immediately, before the house filled—as it shortly would—with our usual Michaelmas party.

It was strange that it should have

happened just then, for it was this change of rooms that led me further to understand some of that unhappy story in connection with which I was destined to play a part not all unhappy. There were unoccupied rooms near my own, but for the nights of my temporary exile from my own well-known, well-loved sanctum, I formed a desire to take up my quarters near the great gallery in the south wing. Out of the gallery, and at right angles to it, in the block of buildings which formed the main body of the old house and which was at right angles to this wing, ran a long passage. On one side of it were two large bay windows, and between them deep recesses filled with bookshelves which bore their burdens of time-worn "classics." In particular there were here old county histories, and among other books Madam

Darblay's novels, more especially, I remember, "Evelina" and "Cecilia" which were my particular favourites. At the other side of the passage were doors at intervals, opening into bedrooms, all of which were quaint and stately with fittings and furniture of a long-past century. These rooms bore various titles. There was "the blue room," "the blue damask room," "the Lennox room," but towards the end nearer to the gallery two—larger than the rest—the further one was called "Lady Dorothy's chamber," and the nearer "the Duchess's room." This last was said to be haunted, and it was in it that I had elected for the present to sleep.

Since my odd adventure at the Kantlin, I had an irrepressible desire to fathom to the depths the ghostly reputation of Ravensthorpe.

I do not think that this arose from mere morbid curiosity, for, as I think I have told you, I had a real and awe-struck but not a cowardly or frightened sense of the continual nearness of another world.

“Are you really sure, Dorothy,” my father had said to me “that you *do* wish to sleep in the Duchess’s room? You know what people say about it, and when one knows such strange reports, there is a danger of one’s imagination running away with one.”

“Father dear,” I had answered, “you know I don’t mind these things, and I love the old wing, I should like to try it.”

“I do not think anything frightens *you*, Dorothy,” he said with a quiet, sad smile, “and why should it? Nothing can hurt those who love God.”

It was sweet of my father to say so, but then it was just like him, always giving others, and especially me, credit for goodness like his own.

The thing was settled, and we busied ourselves that evening with our music, and when bedtime came, I went to my chosen apartment in a frame of mind far away from what people would call "ghostly."

McQuoid attended me as usual when I was undressing. She was amusingly uneasy. When she brushed out my hair, as she was in the habit of doing, I felt her hands tremble, and every now and then she made an ominous pause, and I felt, without seeing it, that she was casting furtive glances over her shoulder.

"McQuoid, I'm afraid you're not very well to-night," I said at last, trying, with-

out entire success, to speak without betraying my state of suppressed amusement.

“I’m no’ sick, my Leddie,” she answered, “but I’m verra meeserable; I’m no’ content to leave your Leddieship in this uncanny room; it’s unco’ drere to be left alone in a place o’ this kind, and I’d as lief stay wi’ your Leddieship, if I weren’t a bit afeared mysel’; they *do* say a deal o’ things about this room, and I’ve heerd that your Leddieship’s mother would ne’er sleep twice in it for the gruesome sights she’d seen.”

“Come, McQuoid,” I said, “don’t be nervous, I don’t believe my mother was a bit afraid of this room or any other. It’s a very comfortable room, and you needn’t be anxious about me. You go and sleep soundly in your own bed, and you’ll see no harm will come to me.”

“Weel, weel, my Leddie, you maun do as your Leddieship pleases, and I’ll no’ say but I’d rather ha’ my ane room, but I’d be sorry for ony harm to come to your Leddieship’s bonny face; but if you need me, I’m a light sleeper, as your Leddieship kens, and you’ll not have to ring twice if you want me, and I daresay,” she added musingly, “that Jenny the under housemaid would come alang wi’ me, she’s a stout bit lassie, and wi’ a daring spirit of her ane.”

“I shan’t need you and Jenny, you may be sure, McQuoid,” I answered, “so good-night, and call me, please, at the usual hour.”

I heard her receding footsteps along the passage, and then all was silent.

The room I was in, was such indeed as to lend itself to ghostly inspirations. It

was very large and very lofty. To the left of the door was a recess, and in this stood the bed, three sides of which were thus near to the walls, the fourth open to the room.

The bedstead was a very beautiful framework of carefully wrought oak ; at the head was a carved scroll, with a family inscription, *Avant Ravensthorpe, jamais derrière*. The curtains were of—now faded—crimson damask, embroidered with really exquisite needlework. About the middle of the room was a deep, high fireplace, with a towering mantelpiece in wood above it, carved elaborately after the fashion of the time of the Charleses, and above this, in the framework, which rose almost as high as the ceiling, was a picture of the Bridge of St. Angelo, with the Basilica of St. Peter's, and the upper stories of the Vatican ;

in the foreground was the river, and on it a gay barge, with two noble ladies seated astern, and a rower in bright costume rowing—in Italian fashion—in a standing attitude in the prow, and a barge moored at the side of the river, with busy workmen in it, engaged at their craftsmen's toil. At the apex of the framework was a ducal coronet overhanging all, with its strawberry leaves quite distinct. At either side of the fireplace were strips of antique tapestry with ducal coronets, and monograms of the Duchess' first husband's family.

The whole length of the opposite wall was covered also with tapestry, with all manner of pictures worked upon it, of hounds and horses and huntsmen, in the finest work of the old French looms. Not on the *whole* length of the wall, for

the tapestry was cut asunder in the midst by a narrow space where the oaken paneling appeared, and above in this space was a really glorious Vandyke—a portrait of a lady. I must tell you something of this picture, and you may *check* my description by examining the original, which hangs in the same spot to this very day.

It was a half-length portrait. On her head she wore a broad-brimmed dark hat, with an abundant feather. Escaping from the hat was a wealth of golden hair. The figure was habited in black velvet, open in front and showing the neck, and trimmed with point lace; deep lace cuffs were turned up over the velvet round the wrists, and round the neck was a stiff, deep ruff, also of lace. The hands were long and delicate, and the fingers rich in rings. As to the face, certainly it was beautiful.

The features were delicately cut and regular, the eyebrows dark and finely pencilled, the mouth small and firm and the lips red; the eyes were of deepest hazel and the complexion exquisitely fair. It was beautiful but not attractive. The brown eyes were clear and piercing, and meditative, but in them and in the *pose* of the lips was an expression of *recueillement* and individuality, certainly proud and almost cruel.

It was the portrait of my great-great-great-grandmother. Of her I must say something before I go on. She had been Countess of Beckford in her own right, and had afterwards married the Duke of Dartmouth. By this marriage she had no children, and titles and property had descended to younger branches of the family. In early life she had been much

about the court. She had been a great beauty, as indeed Vandyke had borne good witness; and, if tradition spoke the truth, she had not been, as I discovered afterwards, the best of women. The Duke had died early, and his widow, still young and attractive, had married later the then Sir Everard Holt of Ravensthorpe. In our family records she always bore the name of the Duchess-Countess. She had carried the Ducal honours which belonged to her into her new home at Ravensthorpe, and had made her young husband feel her pride and force of character. Sir Everard Holt, my great-great-grandfather, was her only son. And—at this time I did not know why—she was said to have made his life unhappy and to have quarrelled with him irreparably some time before he died. The cause of the

quarrel you shall presently learn, but it was so bitter that the mother and son had parted company, rather more than a year before his death, and it was only after that event that she returned to Ravensthorpe where, during the minority of her grandson, this chamber had been hers, and in it, in fact, she had died. It was said that—whatever the cause of the quarrel—she had bitterly repented her part in it, and had ended her days a broken-hearted woman at an advanced age.

Opposite the wall in which was the door and the bed, which I have described, was a deep bay window of mullioned stone. In this stood my dressing-table. Heavy curtains were drawn across between it and the window, and to the left of it, in the corner, was a door.

I confess that when McQuoid's receding

footsteps had died into silence, I surveyed the room, candle in hand, and long did I stand contemplating the Duchess-Countess, and I came to the conclusion that she was exceedingly beautiful, but that I did not like her, and liked her none the more because the picture impressed me with its likeness—dim and uncertain, but still there—to the cruel haughty face I had noticed in the ghostly procession at the Kautlin. When I reached the door in the corner I was weak enough to try it. I knew that it led to a little landing, from which two doors opened beyond, one on a narrow staircase leading down to the lower part of the house, the other on to the grand staircase which descended to the great hall of this wing.

The door was locked, and locked from the outside. Now I *do* think that a

second door to a room which is locked and the key of which is not in evidence, is a source of involuntary uneasiness to any one whose nerves are even slightly in tension at a late hour of the night. I think, to be honest, I *did* feel such uneasiness in some measure, and felt ashamed in another moment of so feeling.

This all happened, as I said, in the early days of September. The weather had been beautiful, and there was a glorious moon, but to-night the wind was rising, and the gusts came so fitfully that there was an uneasy feeling about the tapestries which was not entirely reassuring.

I drew the curtains away with a good swish behind the dressing-table, and threw the window open and looked out into the night.

It was quite beautiful, the moonlight was clear, but the sky was flecked with flying clouds, showing the force of the wind in the upper atmosphere, and round the house the trees were bending with that low melancholy moaning that presages a coming storm. I saw the deer huddled together in groups under the wide-stretching oaks; branches of ivy and honeysuckle waved backwards and forwards against my face as I leant my elbows on the broad window-seat and looked out into the moonlight.

Though the wind was rising the air was balmy, and I leant out enjoying its freshness, and wandering into a land of dreams.

I began by thinking of the Duchess-Countess, and wondering what she had done which had made such a breach with

her son. Then somehow I thought of Walter—you shall hear of him by-and-by—and remembered how I had rushed to the window to watch for his coming when last he had visited us at Ravensthorpe. Then I remembered how he had waved his hand to me as he rode across the green, and a pleasant sense of peace and joy came over me when I thought that in a day or two he would be here again. If I were a little disturbed by all McQuoid's nonsense, and by remembering the really solemn sight which I had seen some nights before at the Kantlin, somehow—I don't know why—the pleasant thought of Walter and his coming quieted me entirely, and after dreaming away for a time in view of the misty distance, and the bright clear moonlight on the stretches of the park, and in calm enjoyment of the distant sounding

of the sea, I closed the window and said my prayers and got quietly into bed.

I very soon fell asleep. I know I went on thinking a good deal about Walter's visit, I don't know why, and the Duchess-Countess and all her faults and failings went entirely out of my head. I wish one *could* always dream of the pleasant things one thinks of in falling asleep, but one can't, as everybody knows, and I did not dream at all.

I don't know how long I slept, but I had slept some time, when—why I know not—I awoke with a start. Certainly it must have been towards morning, for the fire was almost out, and it had been a good one when I went to bed. The moonlight was streaming into the room, but somehow I felt as if a brighter light had fallen upon my eyelids, and I was sure I had heard

the door in the corner open. I didn't like that door, as I have said, and I was not very happy that it seemed to open. Then I had a mysterious sense of some presence in the room besides myself, and I thought I heard a sound like the sweeping of a heavy dress across the floor, and Cogser who always slept on a rug beside my bed was fidgetting about and moaning uneasily. And first I said, "Lie down, Cogsie;" and then I listened and listened, now wide-awake, and at last I said, "Who is there?" quick but loud. There was no answer, but after a minute I was quite sure I heard a heavy sigh.

You can't mistake a sigh. It sends a thrill of pity and sorrow through you. And pity and sorrow are just such feelings as will not let you rest.

"If it is you, Duchess," I said out loud,

“why do you sigh? why don’t you speak?” Then there came another sigh, and then I got out of bed and looked. No, there was nothing, literally nothing. The wind was sighing round the house, and growing louder in the trees than when I lay down to sleep, and the moonlight was clear.

It never seemed to me unnatural for the dead to visit one. When I came to think of it, I could not see why the Duchess-Countess should wish to see *me*, still I thought she might wish it,—I suppose because I had been thinking of her so much. “But if you won’t speak how can I know?” I said quite out loud again, and then I thought how silly I was if it was all nothing, and only McQuoid’s Scottish nonsense, and so I said over the twenty-third Psalm to myself, as my habit

.

was, and turned on my side and fell asleep.

When I woke in the morning, I remember bursting into a fit of laughing. McQuoid was standing by me with such a ridiculous expression on her face. She looked mysterious and inquiring, and yet there was an air of relief about her. I think she expected to find me twisted up into a curtain-ring, or tired out after a nocturnal ride on a broom-stick.

“It’s a wee bit after eight o’clock, my Leddie,” she began; “and how is your Leddieship? I’m no’ sorry to find your leddieship’s bonny face as bright as ever this morning.”

“McQuoid,” I said, laughing, “you’re too silly; what *did* you expect? I always sleep well, and you know that. Why didn’t you call me a quarter of an

hour ago, as I told you? I shall be late for prayers, and you know his lordship wouldn't like that."

"I'll no' say I didn't come in time," was her answer, "but I was a wee bit loth to come in. I no' think this room is canny for us folks, and I've felt a bit uneasy since the other evening at the Spirit's Bridge; but I do believe there's not a ghost among them that would harm your leddieship, bless you! you seem quite at home wi' them all."

"With *them*," I repeated, "with *who*? McQuoid, you're a goose. I believe if I had lived among your old covenanting Puritans, they'd have burnt me for a witch, and you'd have borne your 'testimony'!"

"Weel, weel, you are a wee witch, anyhow," and the faithful old thing bent

over me and kissed me, as she often did.

“Dear McQuoid,” I said, “be quick and fetch me my tea, or I shall be late. Your head is so full of ghosts, you forget everything.”

She always brought me a cup of tea when she called me, except on the Sunday mornings when I made my communions, and then, of course, I kept my fast.

When she had left the room, I thought how fortunate it was that I had *not* told her all I *did* see at the Kantlin, or she would have fled across the border, and never come back to Ravensthorpe again.

When I got up, I did stand for some time before the picture of the Duchess, and I found myself talking to her, and telling her if she only looked proud in the picture

and sighed at night I couldn't possibly find out what she wanted.

Certainly such things at night are awful, even when they are not full of fear, as they never are by day. The breaking of a new dawn is indeed a beautiful and cheering thing. And yet in all the abundant wealth of Nature's pageantry, there also is nothing so moving as the pathetic splendour of the dawn. Is it that it bursts upon us so pure and sinless we feel unworthy of its untainted purity? Is it that it reminds us too vividly of what we might have been, spreading before us the calm and spotless loveliness of a better world? Is it that it speaks too forcibly of those who are gone, lovely and loved, and yet separated by such impassable barriers from this life that seems so real, even though we know it is so quickly

closed ? Who can tell ? I cannot ; but I know that better than all the hours of day I love the dawn. It always saddens me and yet it cheers, saddens perhaps only with that sadness like penitence for anything that seems wrong, which, though saddening, purifies ; or does it cheer only because it makes us young and fresh again ? I suppose it is meant to do so, and it is, perhaps, because it has a message of the joy of the Resurrection.

My father asked me that morning in a quaint way what sort of night I had had ; so I told him I had had a capital night, and seen nothing. He said he was very glad I liked the room, for my own could scarcely be ready for a day or two, and there the matter dropped. Somehow I didn't like to tell him, at least not yet, my exact experiences, for although I was sure

they were realities, they *might* have been only fancies, and to be merely fanciful seemed so extremely foolish.

VII.

I WAS very busy all that morning, making arrangements with the housekeeper in view of many people coming at the beginning of the following week, and all this, and my reading, and a long practice on the violin kept me at work till nearly luncheon-time, before which Cogser and I had, as usual, a run on the terrace.

That afternoon I rode with my father. We took our way along the road which runs above the cliffs, and in the bright September sunshine the sea was a blaze of splendour on one side, as the changing

woods were on the other. There was a fresh and pleasant air, for the wind, which had threatened the night before to become a storm, had now sunk down again to a steady breeze. With the brightness of the day, and the pleasant lightness of the air, and the sunshine, and the inspiring motion of Hedwig as she cantered along the soft grass on the roadside, I was in the best of spirits, and I know I kept catechizing my father on all manner of things. The real reason why I felt bright and happy was that we were soon to have the house full of pleasant people; and especially it was a real joy to me that Aunt Miriam was coming, and a greater joy still that Walter would soon be with us.

Thinking of Aunt Miriam threw my thoughts back to the Duchess-Countess,

for I remembered, long before, laughing at Aunt Miriam's vigorous denunciations of her as a "wicked and unprincipled old woman."

As we rode along, I asked my father various things about her, and somehow, as usual when I touched on any subject connected with the legends which hung about Ravensthorpe, he seemed grave and reserved.

He proposed indeed to extend our ride a little to see her grave, and so we did. She lies in the old chapel of Maurice Ledware, which stands in an out-of-the-way corner, buried among deep woods, some seven miles south of Ravensthorpe.

It is a strange enough spot. The chapel is a perfect mausoleum of the Maurice family—to whom her Grace was near of kin—and who are, I think, an English branch

of the Montmorencys. It is now close by the side of a modern brick church, from which, in fact, it is entered; an unsightly building this church is on the outside, though inside tidy and well ordered, and with a really Christian appearance about the altar and the chancel, which is more than can be said for many churches in our part of England. The tombs in the chapel are many in number, and of all dates from the Conquest down. Some are beautifully emblazoned, some have been unfortunately "restored" in a gaudy and tasteless manner, but the whole are of unusual interest, and quite like themselves and none other.

In particular the Duchess' tomb was in good preservation, and entirely unchanged. As we stood and looked at it, my father said,—

“She was, I believe, an unhappy woman, and she acted in a manner cruel and unkind towards her son. Some day, Dorothy, I may tell you all about it; but it is a painful subject, my little woman,” he added kindly, “and I can’t tell why, I never like to speak much of it; the fact is it never appears to me a *past* matter, it seems to have something to do with us even now.”

“But, father,” I said, “you’re not afraid of the Duchess, are you? she can’t do us any harm; surely God and the angels take care of us,—and then mother prays for us, doesn’t she? Was the Duchess really wicked, father?”

He stood gazing at the tomb for a minute or two, and then he said,—

“No, my darling child, she could do us no harm, and I don’t suppose she would if

she could. She *was*, I believe, wicked, but she repented—so I have heard—before her death. Yes, my child, I am sure your dear mother does pray for you, and God will guard you; but actions of sin, even when people repent of them, have often dreadful consequences, and we are so linked together—we human beings—that the sins of fathers are not without effect upon their children, so that it is a serious thing looking back upon the evil deeds done by those who have gone before us.”

My dear father sighed as he spoke. I knew well enough that he had no doubt that we are each of us able to do right if we will, whatever our ancestors may have done, but I felt sure he was thinking of my dear mother's early death, and my brother's, and that his mind was saddened by these memories, so that he often seemed

haunted by a sense of misfortune, and an anxious fear lest anything should happen to me.

As we left the chapel he added, as if thinking aloud,—

“It was an odd thing of that old woman not to wish to be buried with the rest. She said if she lay in the chantry at Ravensthorpe, her son would never let her rest in peace, as she was sure he would never rest himself. Poor things, if half that people say is true, the very grave seems no resting-place for either of them.”

The day was fading fast as we rode away from Maurice Ledware, and the night was coming up stormy and chill. The wind had risen more and more, and before we turned into the park gates at Ravensthorpe, it was what the fishermen

in the village would call "blowing half a gale of wind."

I was glad to be in the bright warm house again, for we had hardly spoken a word on our way home, and the chill of the evening and my father's melancholy mood had infected me and made me sad, I knew not why.

That night we had some music as usual, and I humoured my own mood, and his I think also, by playing nothing but Spohr; for indeed of all musicians it is only Spohr who penetrates to the deepest fountains of human tears, and indeed it is the violin, and it only of instruments, which can most tenderly *sing* of the sorrows, many, vague, and piercing, which find no words.

When I retired to my room that night I found McQuoid quiet and rational, as if her fears about the ghostly chamber had

been set to rest. My own frame of mind was very different. Somehow or other a sadness had settled down upon me. I had an inexplicable sense of some trial lying before me, a strange feeling that life was about to become a more serious thing, and into my head there came the words engraved on the antique bedstead, "*Avant Ravens-thorpe, jamais derrière,*" which my fancy as swiftly paraphrased into "Suffer, but be strong." Thinking of this, I threw myself on my knees to pray. I prayed my usual prayer for those who were dear to me, for my father and my dear dead mother, and for Aunt Miriam and for Walter. He was such an old friend, I had always prayed for him, but somehow to-night it seemed to me as if I must pray for him more than ever; I don't know why, and then I asked God

for myself, only to make me *strong*. “If I suffer,” I said, “at least may I be strong.”

When I rose from my knees I could not go to bed. I was not frightened exactly, but though I had that sweet satisfaction which comes to us when we cast any care on God, still I had a sense also of unaccountable disturbance, as I have said, more and more upon me,—a sense that my life was reaching a time in it more serious than I had ever known before.

The night, too, was not such as to calm one's mind. It was, as my father had said before I left the Gallery, “blowing great guns.” The wind indeed was rising higher and higher. Round the old Hall it was rushing, dashing against the window-panes, and moaning in the chimney-stacks, as if legions of angry spirits were lashing

themselves into fiercer frenzy because they could not drive all before them. Sprays of ivy and other creeping plants were flung against my window with continual heavy blows of impotent suffering; the wind was whistling through the key-holes and crevices, and moaning and wailing in the empty rooms and passages, and swaying the tapestry with a ghostly sound and motion, and the old house seemed alive with strange sad voices, and when I looked to the darker part of my own chamber, I could have fancied it peopled with dusky phantom forms.

Now and again the tempest rose to a shriek of fury and the brave old walls seemed to rock and shiver under its scourge, and the rain dashed against the window in fierce deluges of water, apparently of weight enough to smash every pane. Then again

the wildest fury of the squall subsided, the rain had ceased, the wind seemed to draw off its forces, and you heard in the distance only the hurtling of the tempest, and along the coast the roar of the breakers, and further out the thunderous music of the lashed and suffering sea.

It was a ghastly night.

For a time I looked out at the torn and tempest-driven clouds as they sped across the moor, and the surge as it was flung up in sheets of spray against the rocks of Kantlin Point, which rises above the hamlet and harbour of Ravensthorpe; then I began to feel chilly; the night was very cold, and wrapping my warmly-padded crimson silk dressing-gown round me, I stirred the fire to a cheery blaze, and threw myself into a great arm-chair to warm my feet and dream of many

things, as it seemed somehow out of the question to go to bed and sleep.

However, though I had not gone to bed, I *did* go to sleep, and I *did* dream.

Oddly enough I dreamt about Walter. I thought I was out on the headland, and that it was blowing a furious gale; there was a figure of some one far out—a woman—beckoning to Walter to come: between the place she stood, and where he was walking there was a deep and dreadful chasm, which he could not see. If he went on as she was beckoning him, he would fall down that terrible precipice into the awful abyss below. I tried to make him hear, I cried to him to stop, and rushed wildly on straining to reach him before the fatal fall; but the wind drove me back, and then I saw dark figures trying to close up round him, and sweep him on to

destruction. I made one more effort, and he heard me and turned; his face was bright, and full of joy and kindness, and he held out his hand to me to come. Then there came a rush of the tempest, carrying clouds of dark and blinding rain, and a fierce crash, as if the rock had been swept from under me—and I awoke with a cry.

I awoke with a cry and sat bolt upright in my chair. The wind had risen to a real tempest, and was literally yelling round the house. The fire had burned down almost to its last embers, but still it cast a fitful light from its expiring blaze through the sombre room. But whether from the fire or other causes, I know not, I could see before me, and in an instant I saw that the door in the corner, the door locked from the other side, was wide open; perhaps the storm had somehow entered

and burst it in, and certainly a blast of deathly air that made me shiver was pouring into the room. But there was more than that. I felt, with a sense I had never had before, a sense of horror, that some one besides myself was there. I sat bolt upright in my chair, and gazed into the strange twilight. Certainly there was some one. I held my breath in something more like a silent fear than I had ever known, and looked. The thin air before me took shape, and facing me at the other side of the fireplace, I saw dimly but certainly a form. It was the form of a woman. Gradually every feature of the face and every curve of the drapery became distinct before me. She was robed in black velvet, which fell in long flowing curves away on the carpet. Round the neck was a ruff of lace, at the bosom the

dress was partly open, and at the wrists white folds of lace fell back upon the velvet cuffs. The hands were thin and long and shadowy, and fell down clear against the velvet robe. But the face! It was old, and yet most beautiful, and with oh! such an expression of woe and pleading, that my rush of fear was overwhelmed and swallowed up in a rush of pity. The hair was grey, silver grey, and in great abundance, and the lips moved; I saw them move as if beseeching, but I could hear no sound.

I rose from my chair, impelled to go nearer to her in very pity. "What is it? what is it?" I said. "Who are you? why have you come?"

In a moment the right arm was lifted, pointing towards the opened door, and the figure turned and began to glide

noiselessly in the direction in which the hand had pointed; and, moved by an irresistible impulse to follow that pleading look, I followed.

In a moment I found myself on the landing, at the turn of the main staircase, and before me swept on the Duchess—for now I was sure it was she—up the staircase towards the room above. Certainly there was some strange light, for the sinking moonbeams—now that I think of it—could not account for the clearness with which I saw it all. I heard the tempest rave, and it seemed to me, as I cast a glance below at the great entrance hall, as if dim and muffled figures were moving to and fro down there in the darkness, and I fancied I heard cruel laughter, which made me shudder, mingled with sorrow-laden moans, as if of those in pain.

In a moment we were on the upper landing, I and my strange guide. Then she seemed to pause for an instant, and again to point towards a narrow door, which I did not remember, and which stood wide open in the further corner of the upper corridor. Then for an instant I paused, struck with a sudden fear, and when I paused, she seemed to turn and clasp her hands, as if entreating. I could not resist the anguished pleading of the attitude and the melancholy eyes, and a tender voice seemed just then to whisper, "*Avant Rarensthorpe, jamais derrière*"

In another moment I was in a small oak-panelled room. From this, one narrow-pointed window looked out into the tempestuous night; round the room, at a glance, I saw high, stiff oaken chairs of the fashion of long-past centuries. Beside the

window stood an inlaid cabinet. Following the entreating gesture of my ghostly guide, I approached it and opened it. I don't know why, but her looks and gestures told me to do so as clearly as the plainest speech. It was bare and empty within. Still the raised right hand pointed steadily at the back of the cabinet; I felt along it, and suddenly a spot on which my finger rested *gave* beneath the pressure, and a drawer sprang out as if moved by a spring. Within it I saw a tiny jewelled casket. I looked to the pale, eager face for further guidance, and again I saw as plainly as words could have spoken it, "Yes, take it, take it."

I drew out the casket and clasped it to my breast; and when I did so the poor worn face burst into a sunshine of joy unutterable, such as I have never

seen on any countenance on earth—but one.

I thought I heard a sigh, too, of unspeakable relief, and then my guide was gone. Fading away into the surrounding darkness, the form of my mysterious visitant had passed into the night that hangs round that impenetrable border-land which limits mortal life.

Was it a dream? No, I was certainly standing in the little chamber. The storm was piping round the battlements, the familiar moon-rays were scarcely penetrating the pointed window, and I was alone.

I groped my way feebly back to the corridor, and when I reached it the chamber door closed behind me with a bang that made the very staircase tremble. Down that staircase I tottered rather than walked, and feared lest I

should faint before I reached the lower landing, the start I had received had been so severe. But I did *not* faint, and I did reach the doorway of my room. I closed it carefully behind me, and the bolt went home in quite the usual fashion; certainly it could not have been burst open by the wind. Still I clasped the casket tight against my heart. I groped for my armchair, and I sank into it dazed and exhausted; but had hardly done so when a knock sounded on the other door, and in an instant it was opened and a light streamed in.

“Dorothy” said a well-known voice,
“Dorothy, my child, are you awake?”

It was—oh, what a relief!—it was my father. When I saw his dear kind face, I threw myself back in the chair with such a sense of comfort and safety as no words

can tell. The mysterious casket I had slipped behind me on a small stool between the chair and the tapestry-covered wall, and there I lay.

“Dorothy, my darling,” he said, leaning over me, “how deathly pale you look ; the storm has terrified you. Why, you have not been in bed, my child ! .It is a fearful night, I am so glad I came.”

“It *is* a fearful night, father,” I answered. “I am glad you came, I am feeling tired and frightened.”

“Come with me, Dorothy, dear,” he said, “the storm is of unusual violence. The great stack of chimneys at the end of the gallery has fallen ; fortunately it has but slightly damaged the roof, for it has fallen into the courtyard ; but this room is not safe, the great stack here, too, is shaken, and it may come through. The

crash was tremendous, I suppose you heard it?"

"Yes," I managed to say faintly, "I heard a tremendous crash."

He raised me up and supported me with his arm and we left the room. I hope I was not very cowardly, but I felt so glad that he had come, and I was so glad he took me with him. I managed, however, to pick up my precious casket and to conceal it beneath my dressing-gown and next my heart.

As we went along the corridor which led from my bedroom past the entrance to the gallery, he put down his candle on one of the old oaken chairs, and we looked out of the bay window into the night. The morning was beginning to struggle up against the darkness, and across the tree-tops we could see what Dante would have

called by some fiercer title than the “*tremolar della marina*”—“the trembling of the sea.”

But even in that dim dawning, what a sight the park was! Groups of elms were lying here and there, heaped up in helpless masses, and even a sturdy oak too had not been proof against the violence of the gale. The terrace below the window was strewn with torn-off branches, and ivy and roses which had clothed the old walls and windows the night before were sweeping prone and helpless along the pavement and the balustrades.

“It is an odd thing,” he said, as we resumed our progress, and as he took up his candle, “that I found in my bookshelves a notice about your friend the Duchess-Countess; and this last night, I see, is the anniversary of her death.”

“Your friend the Duchess-Countess!”
—“*Avant Ravensthorpe, jamais derrière,*”
came into my head, and I felt glad that I
had followed her. Somehow I had an odd
fancy that I had been *her* friend! All the
same I shuddered when he said this, and
he felt it.

“You are tired and cold, my darling
child,” he said kindly, “you must come
with me to the library, the upper rooms of
the old house are scarcely safe to-night.”

The library was warm and cosy. A
splendid fire of logs was burning. The
servants were up, for all had been terrified
by the fall of the chimneys.

My father made a footman bring some
wine and biscuits; he made me eat some-
thing and have something hot to drink,
and then I lay upon the soft cosy sofa,
with my hair all tumbled about the satin

pillows, and he had a *duvet* brought and tucked me up as any mother might have tucked a child in its cot at sleeping-time, and I felt so safe and happy.

When you have gone through an agony of nervous tension, how sweet it is to be safe and tended well with those you love!

Dear, kind old father! None was ever like him. It had been indeed a fearful night, but this was a sweet and happy morning; however the storm outside might rave, I felt safe with my father, and soon, very soon, I was fast asleep.

VIII.

THERE are few things more moving, I think, few more sympathetic with human

struggle followed by rest and comfort, than Nature after a night of storm.

When I woke in my father's library, late in the full daylight of that September morning, the gale had gone down, and trees and flowers and grassy stretches of the rain-swept park, were lying languidly and calmly in the clear bright sunshine, tired out and restful, like a poor human sufferer after a night of feverish pain. Only still—like an impetuous soul that cannot soon be quieted—we heard along the patient stretches of the beach the booming of the angry sea.

All that day I felt half-dazed and in a dream from the strangeness of the events of the night before. I did not tell my father—the time for that had not yet come. I had a feeling that these startling sights were something specially *in time* to me.

One thing, however, I did desire to do, to examine my casket.

It was evening before I found a lonely hour.

I had walked out in the afternoon with my father to examine the extent of the ravages of the storm. Then I had my *petit quart d'heure* in the Chantry, and at last I found myself alone in the gallery, and there determined to investigate the mystery further.

We were to sit in the gallery that night, and so the fire was blazing bright in one deep fireplace where no injury had been done; and before the lights came, seated on a stool by the fireside, and in view of my mother's picture and the mysterious picture opposite it, I opened the casket.

Inside I found two folded papers. In one was a lock of rich golden brown hair, to

which was fastened by a little silken cord, a label, bearing the inscription, "Faithful for ever," and the initials D. M. In the other were four letters. They were withered and yellow with age; but the writing was clear and plain, and of the stiffness and quaintness of form belonging to the seventeenth century. They were heartrending letters, for it was evident that they had never reached the hands that should have opened them. In the earlier one, in each case, there were protestations of affection and faithfulness, and passionate longings to hear again from the loved and absent one. In the one case there was the tenderness and trustfulness of a woman, in the other the eager passionate devotion of a man.

The other two were different. The girl's letter was full of sorrow and longing; her lover's, of anger and despair. It was clear,

enough, on reading them, that each had longed, and longed in vain, to hear from the other, and that in the girl's case there was unflinching trust, with heart-breaking sorrow; in his case, real sorrow, but the doubting and impatient misery of an impetuous man. Her letters were signed "your own Dorothy." His first was "your ever faithful and loving Everard," but the second, from which it was evident that he was doubting her constancy, had simply his name.

The document in which they were folded was very different. It was short, clear and sad. It was written by the Duchess-Countess, and dated a few days before her death. In it she stated that "of much malice, and by temptation of the devil," she had continued to intercept letters between her son and his betrothed, that by this means she had misled each

as to the faithfulness of the other; that thus she had broken two hearts, and caused her son to commit a grievous sin, and indeed had led to his early death; that by the mercy of God her eyes had at last been opened, and she had seen the heinousness of her fault; that she had confessed her sin to her chaplain, “a right godly and learned clerk, and with power to bind and loose,” and trusted humbly for God’s mercy both for herself and those she had wronged; but that, inasmuch as many evil consequences might follow on sin, and as in her confession, from a sudden temptation of shame and fear, she had kept back the *exact* story of the letters, and then had no further opportunity of unburthening her soul, she had written down *this* confession, and in it placed the letters and other things by her intercepted, having a strong conviction

that some of her kin would yet, in a measure, undo the wrong done by her son through her means, and that this *full* confession, too tardily made, might be accepted. And then she added, “and I beseech her who findeth this casket and the things therein contained, to pray for my soul and for my dear son and her who should have been my daughter, and herself by me to take warning, and to be true and faithful, and disregard all evil speeches and slanderous tongues, so that, if it may be, the ill done by me may be undone through her of God’s mercy; and I may rest in peace.”

I could not restrain my tears as I read this sad confession, and these heart-breaking letters of two, evidently separated by evil means.

There was a beautiful miniature wrapped

up in the casket, of such a lovely face, and there was that lock of hair. How sad it seemed! *He* had been intended to have these, he whom she loved. And here after centuries, they had fallen into *my* hands.

As I gazed and meditated with a deep sense of increasing and unexplained responsibility, I raised my eyes and saw the picture of the knight and the lady, and felt at once that I had now some clue to the mystery. I had often, as I have said, felt the pathetic power this picture possessed. It was evidently a scene of parting, of parting which rent hearts asunder. But why had the painter depicted them with heads turned away? In lonely hours I had spent, as I have already told you, much time in this gallery, and some strange fascination had

drawn me to gaze and gaze at these two figures and speculate upon their history—as it seemed—of love and sorrow. Now I had a clue, but a slight one. Were these the two whom the Duchess-Countess had so injured? And why was it? and how? and why did some mysterious misfortune seem to be attached to those who came after them in consequence? And above all, what had *I* to do with it all? I had grown to have a feeling of special kinship with them, a sense of a bond between us of peculiar closeness; *now* the startling events of the last day or two seemed to mark this bond as a real one; and so indeed, as you shall hear in the sequel, it turned out to be.

IX.

SOMETIMES, as I think I must have told you, when we were alone, often in the winter months, and always as we drew near Michaelmas, my father and I spent our evenings in the gallery. On these nights I had always loved to hear the wandering wind careering round the old house, moaning and raving, and bending the branches of the trees, while we sat in the glow of the fire which blazed in one of the deep fire-places. On such occasions, a lamp was placed on the floor before my mother's picture, and so placed that the light fell full upon her sweet sad face. I often glanced up from my book to see it, or sometimes sat upon my dear father's knee

with my arms locked round his neck, and gazed at it, while he talked to me of her. Such was the case after dinner on this very evening. And it was on this occasion, and fresh from the perusal of these casket letters, that I took courage to ask him the history of the cavalier and his love. It was an effort to do so, for somehow I had learnt to feel, and now more than ever, that there was a mystery about the picture, and, as I have said, some undefined connection with myself; and also I felt instinctively that to my father the subject had about it some touch of pain.

“Tell me,” I said at last, as we sat together this night and my head lay on his shoulder, “tell me, dear father, who are those two, that cavalier and the lady, in the picture opposite my mother?”

I felt my father start, then for a moment he was silent, and then he said,—

“That cavalier, Dorothy, is Sir Everard Holt, your great-great-grandfather, the same who lies buried in the south-eastern tomb in the Chantry. The lady who stands by him, whose name you bear, is the Lady Dorothy Masham; she was his betrothed, and now she sleeps in the corresponding tomb in the Chantry at the north-eastern side. Theirs was a sad story: a vow of faithfulness was made between them, and it was not kept. The fault was not wholly theirs. The Duchess, whose tomb we visited but yesterday, was much to blame. Wretched woman!” so he exclaimed, and then after a pause: “Since then, you know, no son of the family, except myself, has ever survived his five-and-twentieth year; my father died at

two-and-twenty, when I was a mere child, his father at one-and-twenty within a month of his boy's birth, and *his* father—that cavalier—as you can see by the inscription on the Chantry tomb, at five-and-twenty. Your brother,” he added with a sigh, “as you know, at a much earlier age. Their deaths have been traditionally attributed to some mysterious consequence of the broken vow, but the early record of the matter remains in my possession; it was written by the family chaplain of the time. You shall read it for yourself.”

That night my father took from a shelf in his library a small quaint volume in MS., written in the curious and picturesque handwriting of the time, and bound in vellum. At the top of the first page was superscribed this title, “The Sad Story of the late Sir Everard Holt of Ravensthorpe,

Baronet, and of the Lady Dorothy Mas-
ham, and of their Broken Vow.”

That night I read the little volume with
eager curiosity. The story, told shortly,
was this:—

Sir Everard had loved Lady Dorothy;
they had loved one another young. When
the troubles came which led at last to the
establishment of the Commonwealth and
the overthrow of the throne, the then
Earl of Arkworth, the Lady Dorothy’s
father, had joined the rebels, while Sir
Everard had espoused the cause of the
king. This had led to a fierce enmity
between the houses of Arkworth and
Ravensthorpe, which had hitherto been
bound together by kinship and affection.

Lady Dorothy’s father had refused to
consent to the projected marriage, and had
even declined to allow his daughter to see

Sir Everard. A meeting had, however, taken place; they had met one Michaelmas eve in the Chantry of Ravensthorpe. The only witness of this meeting was the old priest who wrote the record. The scene of the meeting and the parting he described as one of almost despairing sorrow, and before the parting and while they were standing together on the steps below the altar, the young man, holding the girl's hands in both of his, had sworn eternal faithfulness. She too had taken a corresponding vow. Then these words followed, written in rather larger letters in the chronicle:—

“Then, the said Sir Everard added in my hearing, as followeth: ‘*Should either of us two be unfaithful to this vow betwixt us made, may no heir of the house of Ravensthorpe live to see his son grow up to man's estate, and may we have no rest in*

our graves until some of our kin who follow us fulfil for us this vow by perfect union in faithful love.' And to this the Lady Dorothy said *Amen*. And having embraced one another with tender affection they parted. And," adds the good old chronicler, "never saw I two more loving persons, or two more comely; insomuch that methinks it was a special malice of the Evil One by which they were separated the one from the other, and I pray and hope whatever of sin there may have been in what followeth, God will not lay it to their charge."

The chronicle went on to relate how, within five months from that time, by the machinations of enemies, by forged letters, and such like falsehoods, Sir Everard had been persuaded to believe that the Lady Dorothy had been unfaithful to him, and that she had been espoused to another;

and that he, being of a stormy and impetuous nature, had, in a fit of despair, consented to marry a haughty dame, of a noble French family, who had been in attendance on the queen. The marriage was a miserable one. Sir Everard's life was clouded with anger and sorrow, and within three months of their unhappy union, he and his wife agreed to part. A son was born to them whom his father could never bear to see, and who was in fact my great-grandfather, and was raised to the peerage as first Earl of Ravensthorpe shortly after the Restoration.

What had much contributed to the separation of Sir Everard from his wife was the discovery made by the former, within three months after his marriage, of the entire falsehood of the story of the Lady Dorothy's unfaithfulness, and of the

active part his wife and her family had taken in the deception practised upon him. But the bitterest drop in the cup of sorrow of this unhappy young man, was the further discovery that his own mother, the Duchess-Countess, as she was called, had not only been privy to the plot, but had actually given it her active support. The Duchess-Countess had been a strong Royalist, a “very haughty dame”—so wrote the chronicler—and could not endure the idea of her son’s alliance with the house of Arkworth now that that family had abandoned the cause of the king. She had “resorted to means,” so he went on to say, to compass her purpose which it ill beseemeth any Christian to use. “Of this,” he added, “she hath of late repented, by the mercy of God and prayed His forgiveness, and desireth

humbly that others should know of her repentance and grief for her fault." This, however, had happened after Sir Everard's death. He had gone to his grave with the bitter sense that his mother had joined his enemies in leading him to sorrow, and he had never known that in her possession were these letters, which had met no eyes, probably, but the Duchess's, not even her chaplain's—as I gathered from her written confession—and now my own. But he *had* known his own grievous mistake. His betrothed had, he found, been entirely loyal, and, but for his hasty credulity and impetuosity, they might have been happy.

The news of her lover's marriage broke the Lady Dorothy's heart. They never met again; and she, poor thing, lingered only into the autumn of that same year, and then died.

The Lady Dorothy's brother had neither connived at, nor known of, the plot against his sister's happiness. In spite of the divergence in political matters, he had always loved Sir Everard as a brother. He indeed held views strongly opposed to what he considered the tyrannical measures of the Stuart kings, and, though he never countenanced the fanatical folly of the Puritan party, yet he was possessed by notions almost as fanatical in political and social matters. Hence it was that he, as well as his father, voluntarily dropped their titles, and were each known as plain "Mr. Masham." What they then, of their own doing, let drop, they were formally deprived of when the Prince of Wales became king. Though the estates were not confiscated, the titles were suppressed, and it was only a century later that the

then representative of the old Earldom of Arkworth was raised to the rank of baronet, the rank which the head of the house, until recently, has held.

By the influence of the younger Mr. Masham, the house and estates of Ravensthorpe were preserved from molestation during the Commonwealth, and, what is more interesting and curious, the remains of the Lady Dorothy were laid, not at Arkworth, but in the Chantry at Ravensthorpe, in accordance with her own last wish, and the desire of Sir Everard.

The funeral took place—according to an old custom, then preserved in our family—at night, and by torch-light. The body was borne, so the chronicler stated, by retainers of the Ravensthorpe family, across the downs from Arkworth. It was

sad, he said, to see the cold face of the dead, and to behold the bowed form of the mourner who followed her bier; but the strangest thing of all was this, that by the bridge which crosses the Kantlin, a wild, half-crazy man, as was supposed, made the mourners pause, and foretold, with the gestures and tones of a prophet, that none but a "Dorothy" of the family of the Holts of Ravensthorpe who should take her part in that funeral procession, could be the means of removing the curse from the house, and bringing rest to the dead. The Duchess herself had taken part in the funeral, but this was only for appearance' sake, for she had not yet repented herself of her evil deed, but was, in fact, rejoicing at the Lady Dorothy's death. The unfortunate lady was borne to the Chantry of Ravensthorpe; and it

so happened that my unhappy ancestor stood by the grave of her he had loved on the night of the 28th-29th of September, the Eve and Festival of the Holy Angels, the anniversary—one short year later—of that solemn vow made by him so earnestly, and so miserably broken.

There was another funeral, so said the chronicler, that day year. During that year Sir Everard had led a life of retirement at Ravensthorpe. He had been kind to others, gentle, and thoughtful. His old impetuosity seemed gone, he expressed deep penitence for the error he had committed, he was not unkind even to his haughty mother, though she, being still hardened in heart, never saw him again. He often received the Holy Sacrament, even though it was dangerous in those troublous times to do so, and was known to spend whole

nights in the Chantry in prayer. In the following autumn he died, having survived the Lady Dorothy one year, and on the same night—the Eve of the Angels' Festival—he was buried. Before his death he had told the chaplain that suffering, he was certain, must follow from his fault, but that he also felt a confidence that that fault would be pardoned, and that the vow would yet be kept by the faithful love of some who came after him.

The writer of the story concludes thus :
“ This thought of the unhappy young man hath much occupied my mind. Can it be, I have inquired of myself; that Love, being a thing chiefest and heavenly, transcends the individual, and has force beyond its immediate subject ? And, as the Redemption of our Saviour taketh effect for members of the race by reason of His

membership therein, and His headship in His Holy Body—the Church—can there be vicarious efficacy for any of us in the goodness of those who are bound to us by closeness of kinship, according to the promise of “showing mercy unto thousands” which balances the awful denunciation of punishment for fathers’ sins upon the children who follow them? But this is a questioning in deep things, and it seemeth better, without too close prying into such like mysteries, to commend these two poor souls to the mercy of Almighty God.”

I do not think it was altogether prudent of my dear father to place this story in my hands at so late an hour. For all that night, at least until the first faint streaks of the dawn were coming, I read and re-read the story, which was told quaintly, but

with much feeling, and I shed some tears, I think, over my poor young, broken-hearted kinswoman and her lover, my own ancestor, who had been so hasty and so unhappy

This too I resolved, that more earnestly than ever would I pray for these two. For indeed, I had always prayed for them in a perfectly simple and childlike manner, when I went to the Chantry and prayed for my mother. It had never occurred to me to cease to speak of *her* to God because she had gone to Him, and having read the words on the other tombs often, I had thought it my duty simply to obey them; though, until now, I had *not* fully understood the special force of their entreaty, “Pray for the repose of this poor soul.”

I have learnt in later life that there are some who deem it wrong to pray for the dead. This had then never occurred to

me. The dead had always seemed almost closer to me than the living. My mother, I firmly believed, was often near to me, and, with the angels, had a "charge over me;" and I could not have imagined then that I could displease God by speaking to Him in prayer of any I loved, as I loved some who were gone. I am glad to learn that any contrary opinion is modern and novel, and not resting on any command of the Holy Scriptures, nor supported by the learned doctors of the Church, as I am inclined to believe it is contrary to common sense and love; but being a woman, and unskilled in matters so deep, I do not venture on strong assertions, but only record the truth about my own actions.

I determined, then, to pray more earnestly for Sir Everard and Lady Dorothy, and more than ever the idea took hold of me that

there was some special tie binding them to myself, and that they, in some strange way, were conscious of the fact.

It was after this (how long I know not, a day or two I suppose), that I perceived on one of these still autumn evenings, when I visited the gallery alone, that there appeared to be a strange clear light, for which the fading sunset could not account, in the gallery and near the picture.

Once or twice when crossing the park or walking on the terrace, or more especially when standing by the churchyard gate—at a point where the south wing was visible—I had imagined I saw the great end window of the gallery gleam with the same extraordinary glow, but now I was certain of it.

This I never told to any one, any more

than the other incidents here recorded. At first I was startled, but by-and-by I took it as a matter of course. No one appeared to notice it but myself. It seemed to me a friendly light, and in some mysterious way to indicate a secret sympathy between myself and those two represented by the picture.

What that tie might be I never consciously discussed, I simply *felt* it. There has never seemed to me to be anything astonishing in modes of communication with the unseen world other than the ordinary symbols—which we call language—of our daily life.

What that tie was became plain enough to me afterwards. And the way in which it became plain is that natural and yet strange part of my story which now remains to be told.

X.

ALL this had happened in the early part of September. And it was on the 14th of the month—I remember it as being Holy Cross Day—in this same year of which I am writing, that Walter came to spend some weeks at Ravensthorpe. You know well who I mean by Walter, although I have not said much about him ; still I have mentioned him in this narrative before.

He was our kinsman, though a very distant kinsman, and was a few years older than myself. His father was a baronet, and a few months before this had died, leaving him as his successor to the property and the title. He had been many times at Ravensthorpe before, and he and I were on the easy footing of very fast friends.

In person he was a very ideal of boyish English beauty. He was tall and straight and lithe, and broad-shouldered and strong. His hair was sunny and curling, his eyes deep blue, and large and clear and honest; but it was his frank and pleasant smile that won all hearts. He was courteous and gentle in his ways—especially, as a true gentleman ever is, to women, and he was full of pleasant, harmless fun. I have ever thought, as indeed I think I have said already, that really good men are never wanting in an element of humour. The dreary type of goodness always repels me, and rouses my suspicions. For real humour is surely closely akin to real goodness and seriousness and sincerity. It is only thorough truth and simplicity of character appearing in ways appropriate to itself.

My father loved Sir Walter—as now

he was called—and so did I. Not a bit, I thought, in a way that lovers talk of love, but in an open, easy, friendly fashion, as one who had become a necessary and pleasant element in the sunny side of my life.

We often read and walked and rode together. Sometimes I went with him a little way when he set out with his gun, and helped him in his quest for water-hens in the tree-shadowed pond far down in the park, though I was not always happy when he had success in killing the poor little nimble things.

We had had a pleasant time the first few days of the visit; for he and I and my father were quite alone.

Then the house began to fill for our usual Michaelmas gathering. Of course Aunt Miriam came, and Miss Majoribanks, and Miss Marjory and Miss Hordle, whom

we called familiarly Eleanor; and an old soldier, Colonel Franklin by name, with his dear kind wife. She was the kindest, brightest, pleasantest of women, and he was genial and gracious, and very fond of me, always carrying on with me his little cheery *badinage*, and insisting upon having me as a companion in his short daily walk before dinner, when we had plenty of laughter and real harmless fun. Then there was a Lord Arthur Hepburn, a young man, the second son of a ducal family in the county,—and a friend of Sir Walter's. He had long legs and a pleasant face, and black hair, and a loud cheery laugh. There was also a kindly, uninteresting neighbour of ours—a certain Sir Godfrey Hyde, of whom nothing more particular needs to be said.

There were others, too, for the house was full, but who they were, I have alto-

gether forgotten, with one notable exception. *This* party I felt to be exceptionally important, because it was larger and gayer than anything since my mother's death, and also because my father had announced to me that as soon as our guests dispersed, it was his intention to take me to winter in Rome. And this proved to be, in a manner, the close of our old still life at Ravensthorpe.

XI.

THE day before the arrivals, an incident happened which made an impression upon me, and which has a close connection with my story. I had gone to visit a poor old woman who was ill in bed, and lived in a cottage on the cliff. Walter had gone out shooting after luncheon, and I had started late on my errand. When I left the

cottage to return home it was already growing dusk. There was a bit of lonely road above the sea before I could reach the gate into the plantation. As I turned a corner on the road I saw, or thought I saw, a rough-looking man before me. Only the evening before my father had said something about suspicious tramps being in the neighbourhood, and when I saw the figure on the road, his words came back into my mind and I felt uneasy.

I passed him quickly, and then I thought I heard him quicken his pace as he followed. I reached the gate to the plantation. *Then* there was a gravel path, and then a wooden door in an archway leading to the churchyard. I thought I heard him also enter the plantation and I grew frightened and hurried on. I

banged the wooden door behind me, but the lock, I suppose, did not catch, and I thought I heard it open, and the man come following on.

At another time I would have paused, as I passed the church porch, and gone in, for the quiet time I loved, to the Chantry and the tombs, but now I positively ran. I passed the church, and reached the yew-tree which stands by the other gate leading from the churchyard into the copse, which separates the churchyard from the Hall. I was running now, and as I passed the yew-tree I caught my foot in something—a root, perhaps, protruding from the ground—and fell. I felt a sudden twinge of pain. My head, I suppose, had struck the angle of the wall or door, a giddy sensation came over me and I knew no more. In fact, I had fainted.

Then it seemed to me that I was in a dream, and I heard a voice saying, "My darling, more to me than all the world," and then I became fully conscious, and there was Walter kneeling by me, and his gun beside him on the grass. "Are you better, Dolly dear?" he said, and there was, I felt instinctively, a tone of anxious fear and tenderness in his voice.

Then I remember such a thrill of relief and joy as I had never felt before, when I saw plainly that it was he; his face bent down to mine brought life so quickly back to me. "Yes, I am all right now, I don't know how I could have been so stupid; but, Walter, is there any one there?"

"No, no one; but, Dorothy dear, what made you faint? You *never* faint. I found you lying here. What has happened?"

“Nothing,” I said. “I was frightened, and I think I tripped and struck my head, it pains me a little still.”

Then he helped me up, and held me for a moment in his arms to steady me. As I rose I remember that my hat blew off in a sudden gust of wind, and Walter caught it; and a great pin slipped out of my hair, and down it all came tumbling about my shoulders. For a moment he caught it in his hands, and I heard him murmur, “Such a wealth of golden brown!”

I don’t know why I felt so glad. Perhaps because I was safe and the tramp, if tramp it was, who frightened me, had disappeared. But in spite of all my faintness, somehow I *did* feel very glad indeed.

“See here,” he said, as he wrapped my shawl about my shoulders, “I will fasten

it with this; this is a pin I got to give you, and it will be useful now. Keep it for my sake, Dolly ;” and he took a large beautiful shawl-pin—a great cairngorm, set in gold—out of his waistcoat-pocket, and fastened it in my shawl.

“Thank you, Walter,” I said, “that is very kind.” He only put his arm round me to steady me, I was still so shaken, and so we went towards the conservatory, and through it to the house.

That was a very, very happy evening. I felt it so, because the days that followed were not happy, and we only know the loveliness of the sunlight fully, by its contrast with the cloud.

XII.

ONE visitor in the house I have not

mentioned. This was Lord Arthur's sister. She was several years older than I, very handsome, and had been very much in society. I had only seen her twice before, at my aunt's house in London, and then thought her beautiful and attractive. She was more beautiful, if possible, now, and before she had been three days in the house had won my heart completely.

Some people are by nature so *sympathétique* that while they are with you, you are their first object in life. Their sympathy and affection is indeed very easily transferable, but, for each successive recipient of it, it is for the moment strong. I do not think such persons can be justly accused of hypocrisy or pretence. They really have wide, sympathetic and rather shallow hearts, and perhaps a deep need which they themselves feel is the secret of

much of their attractiveness. Poor human souls ! How beautiful, how necessary love must be for you, considering how near the edge of fatal untruth you will go to win it '

I have thought of this later, at the time I did not think of it ; I then knew too little of human character and of the world.

Lord Arthur's sister was of this class. I was young and warm-hearted, and by nature having a dislike to anything approaching pretence, so sincere that I fear I sometimes passed the line on the way-side which marks the frontier land between frankness and *brusquerie*. In a few days she had won me entirely.

Somehow or other I became, however, half-conscious of the fact that Walter and I were much less of companions than had

been our wont. I never said this to myself exactly, but I was certainly feeling it; and with the feeling came a chilling frost, which seemed for the time to check my springtide of girlish joy.

When a house is very full every one must exert themselves. Entertaining friends is a great pleasure, but it does entail hard work. Walter was so old a friend he was almost like my father's son, and when this wretched feeling kept creeping over me, I drove it back by saying how good he was to exert himself to make things "go." None the less, my sudden affection was sadly chilled towards Lady Alice, and I knew, too, that while Walter attended much to *her*, he seemed to be less able to help in entertaining others.

In particular, a day or two before Michaelmas, we had a riding party to visit

a neighbouring ruin. Very soon I could not help seeing that Lady Alice had drawn Walter away with her on some pretext or other, and though I exerted myself much to do the honours to all the rest and be cheery and bright, somehow I felt as if the September sun were a delusion, and a death fog really wrapping the earth.

At last we reached Michaelmas Eve, "the eve of the Holy Angels" as my dear father always called it, not from want of veneration for the great Archangel, but from a traditional love for the title, which was used in the dedication of our Church.

Walter and I were still of course on the best of terms, and whenever we met he was so bright, and so kind and gentle, it made me supremely happy ; but this day I and he alike had to devote ourselves to our guests, and when that was the case, it seemed to

me that Lady Alice monopolized him entirely.

We had been walking, driving, riding, in various detachments in the afternoon, and about half-past five we met in the green drawing-room, where on such occasions my father, anticipating a now universal custom, had what would in these times be named "afternoon tea."

Lady Alice was in the highest spirits.

"What can we do," she said, "till dinner-time? Let us visit the gallery in the gloaming. Come, Sir Walter, will you come? Don't they say it is the time when the ghost-light is seen?"

I had never heard this spoken of before. I imagined it was my own secret, but I suppose some tradition of it had got abroad. I was much pained, and then when Sir Walter

laughed and answered, "I suppose you think it will need Lady Dorothy's spiritual imagination to see *that*," I was even more distressed.

He saw it, and as he passed me, leaving the room with her, he whispered, "Never mind, Dolly, forgive me, I am *so* sorry; and you never misunderstand *me*, Dolly, do you?"

In the gallery all was gloom, and after we had amused ourselves talking on ghostly subjects, Lady Alice asked about my beloved picture.

"I think," she said, "whatever be the story of these two, they were a dull couple, gazing into vacancy in opposite directions, don't you?"

The question was general, but Walter answered after a pause,—

"No," he said, "there *is* something

mysterious about that picture, and the lady is an ancestress of mine, in a way, as her brother was my great-great-grandfather, so I trust you will not speak lightly of her."

It is a strange thing, but it is a fact, I had never thought of this before. And now it broke upon me with a sudden and strange astonishment that Sir Walter was the head of the Masham family to whom this unhappy Lady Dorothy had belonged.

Of course we saw no supernatural light that evening. I think we were none of us in the kind of spiritual temper which alone, one would fancy, would make communication possible with the other world.

Still Lady Alice would not be quiet, and I did think it a little unkind of her, chiefly because I was sure it teased Walter.

Perhaps I was hard upon her. People who are in high spirits often say things thoughtlessly, which give pain without the least idea that they do so.

“Isn’t it this part of the house,” she rattled on, “that they say is haunted? Doesn’t some old duchess among your wicked ancestors wander about here? Haven’t you got a picture of her somewhere? Do let us see the haunted room. Oh! by the way, Lady Dorothy sleeps there now, doesn’t she? Why do you sleep there?” she went on, turning to me; “*I* would not for the world. Do you ever see her? I *should* like to see a duchess in Ghostland, just to see how she comports herself, and to take a pattern from her gowns: only if I did, I think I should have a fit, and forget all about the fit of the gown. *Have* you ever seen her, Lady

Dorothy? Now I'm sure you have, *do* tell us what she is like; was she terribly wicked? I suppose a ghost isn't worth having unless there has been some tremendous crime. But then, *your* ancestors couldn't be wicked, I suppose. And how can ghosts wear gowns? Where can they find their dressmaker? Or how do they keep the old ones so well? I wish I could mine; but then, my maid would think it mean. I suppose the maids were better trained in the days of King Charles. Wasn't she a lady of that time? Do make Lady Dorothy tell us all about her, Sir Walter. I am sure she has made her a full confession, and that she knows her whole story "

I felt cold all over as she rattled on. The last few busy days had settled my strange experiences quietly in my mind,

and her words seemed perfectly sacrilegious as they roused within me the memory of all the anguish and suffering that had been revealed to me in those two extraordinary nights. But I only said,—

“ If a spirit *is* allowed to appear to those who are living in this world, I suppose they must be allowed to do so in the form and dress in which they would be known when living here, so I see no difficulty about the gown ; but you may certainly see my room if you like.” My theory on ghostly garbs, I should say in honesty, was not my own. I have read it somewhere as the opinion of some learned divine, but I do think it sensible.

“ That’s a good thought,” Walter said, as we moved into the corridor, “ about appearances and the garb of ghosts, if they *do* appear it must be so. I

wonder do they," he added, as if thinking aloud.

By this time we had reached the room, and they all examined the picture with care. Even Lady Alice seemed solemnized by that sad, haughty face, and to me it seemed more than ever beautiful and pathetic in the light of all I knew.

"Dolly," said Walter, falling a little behind the rest as we left the room, "I wish I knew that you were not sleeping in this room. It is very splendid, but very sad, and I believe the Duchess-Countess *was* a wicked woman."

He spoke so tenderly, it touched me much, and I answered,—“Yes, she was wicked, Walter, but she repented; I hope she may rest in peace.”

“I hope so,” he said gravely. “I wonder can ill deeds be undone, I hope

they can in some way, and then the dead may rest. Don't sleep here, Dolly, don't."

As he spoke I was sure I heard a heavy sigh behind me in the room we were leaving, but it was more of relief than of suffering.

"I *do* return to my own room to-night, Walter," I said, answering his former words.

"I *am* glad," he said with his own bright smile, "though nothing could harm *you*, Dolly," and then we returned to the gallery.

XIII.

THAT evening the dinner-party was a large one, and my energies were taxed to the utmost to fill the place of hostess. All the

evening through I was conscious how bright and pleasant Sir Walter was—the very life of all around him—but never a word more passed between him and me.

Just before dinner, indeed, as I was hurrying down the great staircase, I saw him standing looking up. I could not but be struck by his bright face and manly beauty, nor fail to notice a shadow on the brightness, and find a touch of sadness in his tone.

“Dolly, dear,” he said, “you are looking too beautiful to-night.”

I think I felt a little bound of my heart as he said so, but I was angry at feeling so much emotion, and I was still unhappy about Lady Alice.

“Don’t be silly, Walter,” I said, and passed on.

As I passed I knew that he looked very

sad for one moment, and I felt I had been a little cruel, for he held a crimson rose out to me from a bunch which was in his hand. I think at that moment I was strangely wicked and wilful. I thought the bunch was for Lady Alice, so I tossed the rose contemptuously along the carpet. I saw that he went quietly and picked it up and wore it in his buttonhole. Lady Alice had no flowers; I knew, afterwards, that he had meant them all for me.

I suppose it is a part of good breeding to dissemble your feelings in public. I have often wondered where the line should be drawn. I think I succeeded well that night, for I never talked and laughed more in my life, and I never was so miserable. And as for Walter, he was the life of the evening, so I supposed he must be happy.

We women are, I think, strangely quick in our perceptions, but oh! what sad mistakes we make about those whom we love! I have since noticed this to a degree really tragic, in more cases than one.

XIV.

“Впом we love”! yes, for no more self-deceiving was possible for me. I had found out my secret that night. It had come upon me with the force of an electric current. Never, never had I said it to myself, and now and again when the dim thought came up into my mind, I mean when it came near the threshold of my mind, I had turned away with such determination that it fled into the misty

land where unformed thoughts wander if we refuse to give them birth.

To-night I was weak and weary, the long strain of that brilliant evening had broken me down. I had said good-night with perfect composure about ten o'clock, or a little before, for, hostess though I was, I was allowed to slip off early in consideration of my youth.

"You are tired, my child," said my father; "you have walked too far to-day," and he leant over me,—dear, kind old father!—and whispered to me that I had better go.

I looked to the whist-table, and saw that Lady Miriam had finished her rubber and was sitting bolt upright with a grim composure, while Sir Godfrey and the Colonel explained why a wrong card had been played, and she had the air that told

me she had had her allowance and was ready for rest.

Miss Majoribanks was talking loud and long over a game she had invented (or said she had), and the rest were laughing at the invention, or perhaps laughing at her. I slipped away to the card-table and offered Aunt Miriam my arm. She rose in her stately way, "Well, child, I suppose I am to go," and took my arm at once.

I began to collect for her the various articles of her luggage, bags and work and especially the shawl which lay over the back of the chair, and armed her off.

She made her usual stately bow to the company at large, and the whist players in particular. No one moved, only I fancied I saw Walter pause in his laughing talk and watch us ; Eleanor slid into Aunt Miriam's chair, and Sir Godfrey, and the

Colonel, and old Miss Marjory, who sat them all out, prepared for another rubber, and we glided off into the great hall.

The lights were all aglow, and there was a tray set out with wine and various waters for the gentlemen. It has always been an unsolved problem to me why men can't sleep without such things, while women can. I suppose our vitality is better regulated. But that by the way.

I lighted Aunt Miriam's candle and led her as usual to her bedroom door. She always slept on the ground floor, indeed I doubt if she ever went up stairs, except at times to the gallery. And then her maid received her.

"Good night, my child," she said, "you go to bed ; you are very pale to-night, you have walked too far."

“Good night, Aunt!” I answered, and turned away.

I found my own room lighted and ready, and told my faithful McQuoid she needn’t wait, I wanted no assistance to-night.

When she shut the door I then felt free. I was in my own dear room again. At last I was alone, and no eyes to watch me. I flung myself on the sofa, and cried. Oh! how I cried! I hadn’t cried like that for years, I think. Why did I cry to-night?

That thought had mastered me. It *would* be born. No longer could I contend against it. I was helpless and powerless. There it was, clear and plain, no holding out against it any more.

I loved Walter; I *loved* Walter; yes, I loved him to distraction. It seemed

to me unmaidenly to say it, even to think it, yet I thought it, and said it again and again. I was helpless. Why, oh ! why had I been so insane ? How could he care for me ? He ! He who knew the world and was so bright and charming ! and then with that splendid woman evidently entranced by him and entrancing him ! Oh ! that I had never seen him ! And life was now so different, it never could be the same !

Then I sprang up and was angry with myself. Why had I allowed that thought to find the light ? I was angry with myself. I might have conquered it. Now it had mastered me. A thought once given a form and clothing is a power which it never is if it can be driven, before that fatal moment, from the threshold of the mind. Well ! that was over now and

there it was. I knew it. I had allowed it. Henceforth life must be lived by me with that thought in possession of me, or at least existing as a memory, do what I would.

Well, I would put it into its proper place. If it must live as part of me, it should not master me, I would not be a fool, I would struggle for some self-respect and feel that I could conquer.

How? Old habits come back upon us in the moments of great decisions. I would pray. I had always been in the habit of carrying every tiny care to God. I was sure also that my mother's spirit, whose companionship I had long cherished, would help me. I would pray then by my mother's grave.

Blessed thought! I was strong from that moment, for I knew what I would do.

On what followed I need scarcely dwell. In the lone dim church, unlighted but by the lamps before the High Altar, and the single one in the Chantry, I carried my cares and fears and sorrows straight into the other world. The thought that had come to me, however, grew stronger in prayer. It was mine. It should rule in no wrong way, in no way unmaidenly, but, if it were God's will, it should be kept as a sacred thing.

It might be imagination; it might be a child's mere dream. It should be tried and tested. I would be true to it, if indeed *it* were true. To myself I would never be untrue. To be true to oneself seemed to me a first necessity, and had not that angel voice said, "Be true, be faithful"? No lover should ever claim my fealty, if the love of my heart were not his, if *this*

as old friends. Indeed, he *seemed*—now that I think of it—the sadder of the two, though I am sure I was sad enough, but I dared not show a symptom of it lest I should break down altogether. That is the way we women suffer. I was a little glad that he was to be in Italy, even though it was Florence and not Rome, and I was very glad that our parting had been affectionate, for whatever we feel, it is pleasant to part with kind words. So I have always thought, for in this sad world of chance and change, how little we know, at any parting, whether here we shall meet again !

At last they were all gone ! How nice it was ! Yes, it may seem unkind, but I was really glad ; glad even when dear Aunt Miriam left. My heart was too full, and my mind too busy to endure the company

love were really mine. I said aloud alone on my knees that night, "I will be faithful." That night I slept in peace. Peace comes, I think, always, amid whatever trials, to those who are deliberately determined to be true to themselves—to do their duty.

XV.

A DAY or two later the party broke up. Gradually they melted away; Walter first. He returned to Florence, where he was still connected with the embassy. As far as happiness went, the house appeared empty when he left it; still I had *settled* the matter, at any rate for the present, and I felt calm and trustful. We parted in a kindly, affectionate way,

of any one but my father now. And then we were leaving sweet, quiet Ravensthorpe within only a few days, and you want peaceful hours to say "Good-bye" to an old and tried friend. To me it seemed a very eventful leaving, as indeed it proved. It was the breaking up of an old life, which would never come back quite in the same way again. I had a strange presentiment of this, though I didn't exactly know why. But that is a foolish remark, for who knows "why" in presentiments? Voices come from the other world to warn and teach. If one knew all the "whys" the voices need never come.

There was a great deal of carrying of trunks and boxes, and a great deal of driving away, but at last they were really *gone*. I could have said "Hallelujah," only that my heart was heavy about

Walter, and I really loved Aunt Miriam, and to include her in my Hallelujah chorus would have been, I thought, unkind.

We hadn't much time for thoughts of joy or sorrow, however, for in four days we were to go ourselves. It was my father's way, when he *did* take a step, to act with promptitude. He had made up his mind that I must winter in Rome, or the strain of many kinds, I suppose, had told upon me, and I was far from well. We were to go, and so, as I well knew was sure to be the case, no time was to be lost.

As far as I was concerned, there were very few preparations to be made. When I had dragged out the books and music, and the drawing things, and collected together some portraits, so that McQuoid

should make no mistake as to what to take and what to leave, and strapped up my beloved violin safely in its case, as was my habit, with my own hands, I left her to do the rest. My father managed all the business details, but though he *was* busy, yet he always arranged things so as to have the evenings in quiet with me in the drawing-room or the gallery, though we had no more music, I was out of humour for it just then.

Those four evenings I have never forgotten. They were really the winding-up of an old life. Plenty of happy days were in store for me, as it turned out in the end, but the life of many years, when my father and I were all in all to each other at Ravensthorpe, would never be quite as it was again.

When a father and daughter are much

to one another, their love is special and sacred. There is that deep tenderness which comes from protection and dependence; for indeed, though my father protected me with all the strength of a man and the careful thought of a woman, yet I knew, and it was very sweet to know it, he depended on me too. Perhaps it is not so in all cases. I do not know, for certainly there was never any one like my father. However many I have had to love me—and God has never stinted me of such—my dear old father has a shrine in my heart from which he can never be displaced, for indeed it is all his own.

I spent those four days, then, saying “good-bye.” And if I linger over them in this way, you will understand that it is because they impressed themselves upon

my mind in an extraordinary way in connection with the strange events which had happened, and the stranger one which closes my story.

They were my days of "good-bye." I saw all my poor people, and the dear old vicar, and my pony and my pigeons, and the gardener's boy who was lame, and to whom I took fruit always on Sunday ; and I took presents to all my Sunday-school class, and visited my friends the fishermen on the beach, and old Janet, who kept the lodge at the end of the main avenue. Cogsie of course I did not say "good-bye" to, for Cogsie was to come with us, I couldn't part with *him*.

"No," I said, "certainly not ! Part with you, Cogsie ? I should think not indeed ! You shall come to Rome, Cogsie, and get the Pope's blessing, dear, and

visit the Wolf on the Capitol, only you mustn't worry her, dear, must you? No! that would never do. Cogsie would go to the galleys if he did so, and then what would his mistress do?" And Cogsie danced on in front of me, looking very intelligent because I carried a stick in my hand, to be thrown from time to time for his amusement, and when I finished any such remark—of which Cogsie and I made many to one another when alone—I threw the stick with all the force at my command, and Cogsie rushed headlong in pursuit, returning presently with it to resume the conversation which had been interrupted by our athletics. This particular conversation we had held on my way to the church the last evening before we left home.

XVI.

FOR it was in the gloaming on that last evening that I went to say "good-bye" to my mother's grave.

Ever since the night on which my vow of faithfulness to Walter's love had been made, the church had been dearer to me than ever.

I had always *felt* rather than thought Ravensthorpe to be a place somehow akin to the spirit world, but naturally this last month, and now on these last four days, it seemed to me more so than ever. There was a special mysterious quietude, not at all, so it seemed to me, the natural stillness of the tranquil autumn weather but the sort of stillness which broods

around you when you feel that there is a presence in the place. People will say this is fanciful, but then people who never think of the unseen world will say anything. I *know* it was a real truth

Somehow, on these days more than ever, I constantly felt that unseen friends were very near me. I do not think this is irrational with respect to a place. Places are surely the scenes of very serious human trials, whose consequences pass into another world, and the interest in which, we know, extends to creatures of a higher life.

The Holy Scripture, I had heard our dear vicar say, spoke of Princes of the Heavenly Host having special charge of countries and nations on earth, and the care of angels for individual souls I believe the Church has always taught. And here, so near our church, dedicated

under the title of the Holy Angels, and with my experience of that night at the Spirit's Bridge, there seemed nothing presumptuous in my thinking that the Blessed Angels took a deep and tender interest in us who worshipped there; yes, and in the graves of our dead; and I do not know how to explain such things, but it seemed to me not strange that those who are gone should take a special interest too.

I do not think I argued in any such way then, and I hope there is nothing presumptuous or rash in my doing so now; but I know that I *felt* it, and I was more than ever convinced that on these last days of my old life at Ravensthorpe, unseen presences were all around me. I know people will say this was because I was a lonely and imaginative child. Perhaps so. Well, they must say what

they think. I can only tell you the facts and what they led to.

Well, that evening, when I left Cogsie on the mat at the door—for Cogsie never entered, but always lay there quietly to await my return—I found the church in a preternatural stillness.

The evening light was glancing in pale radiance through the western windows, and the slight flicker of the lamps before the altar, and the single light by my mother's tomb, made the chancel and the Chantry more than usually dim.

That sweet Chantry! I felt so sorry to say "good-bye" to it! I stole softly through the gate and knelt first by my mother's grave and said my usual prayer; and then I stretched up and kissed the dear old marble face, and felt that she was by me and caressed me. Then I

went on to the altar steps and prayed for the repose of those poor souls. There seemed an unusual quietness there, such as I had never felt before, like the quietness when weary people are beginning to settle at last to sleep.

The strange thing was, too, that I connected it all with the thought of Walter. Perhaps it was that he was ever in my mind. Certainly he was *that*, for whatever I said or did, the thought of him was there ; but now, whereas I had been very sad in thinking of him gone, and gone too, as it seemed in some ways, entirely out of my life—for I took it for granted that he would marry Lady Alice—I was at present full of quiet, happy thoughts about him, and I never doubted but that in some way he belonged to me.

Then I stole quietly through the little

archway below my mother's tomb, and turned into the chancel, and kneeling at the high altar steps I again reverently repeated my vow of faithfulness to my love for him. I thought I heard something like a quiet sigh of happiness near me, and *I* felt quiet and happy.

An odd fancy possessed me as I left the church,—to bring Cogsie in to say “good-bye.” At first he would not come, and then I took him up and carried him in my arms, and he looked so deprecating and pathetic with his great brown enduring eyes fixed on me, that I almost laughed. For dogs do put on such pathetic airs all about nothing ! But when he reached the Chantry, to my astonishment he lay and moaned in such an odd way, and kept licking my hand and huddling up against me so tenderly. It was strange. I think the dumb creatures are conscious of the

unseen, especially if they are good. And Cogsie was very good. He had a conscience, at any rate, and I think he tried to obey it; he learnt his tricks so carefully, though sometimes got confused among them in his moments of excitement, and he often did his duty under much temptation. I have seen him do so when I teased him, leaving a cup of coffee near him with sugar in it. That was a weakness of Cogsie's; but when I told him not to touch it, he would guard it, untouched, for any length of time, and, though he licked his lips (which was rash of him), he turned his head away.

Cogsie and I walked very thoughtfully away that evening, and when I reached the churchyard gate, it seemed to me the light into the great window of the south wing was brighter than ever before.

XVII.

THAT night my father and I dined in the gallery. On these occasions my father could not bear the servants to remain in the room; either he thought it hard upon them standing so long to so little purpose, or else he felt restrained in their presence in his talk to me.

I cling to every detail of that last evening, for really, as I have said, it closed a chapter in my life, and so I may as well tell you a very funny thing which happened, for it will give you an idea of things of our old life, and lesser things in life are almost everything.

Hutton was our butler. He was nearly my father's age, and had been about him from a boy. He went with him always,

and, butler though he was, disliked the notion that any one could “do for his lordship,” except himself. He was about my father’s height, too, and had short grey hair, also as my father had, and he acquired a certain stateliness of gait not unlike his master. I think from long and admiring contemplation, he had unconsciously acquired many of my father’s ways, so that people said he was like him. That was nonsense, for he wasn’t really like him at all. My father used to say that it was Hutton who gave the real air of antique respectability to the house, and that without Hutton, Ravensthorpe would be nothing. And so it sometimes happened that in the passages, at dusk, the servants, if they met him, very commonly addressed him as “my Lord.”

Hutton always pretended indignation at this, and was wont at such times to say,

“Fie! For shame! It’s only *me*, it’s not his lordship.” The answer was invariably “Oh, beg your pardon, Mr. Hutton, I had thought it was his lordship, you do favour him so much!”

My belief is that Hutton had a secret satisfaction in such mistakes, and I imagine they were in consequence oftener made than need have been. My father used to say perhaps they really had grown like each other, as children do, they say, by gazing at their mothers, or else it was that his old clothes percolated down to Hutton, and thus gained an added air of dignity. I trust the latter was the truer explanation. I never saw any one like my father.

Now Hutton resented the law of retirement during our dinner-time. And hence he not infrequently returned on some excuse or other, without any summons

from the antique silver bell which stood on the table by me, and on these occasions he furtively took up his station behind my chair. Partly he felt it an affront to be dismissed with the ordinary drove of footmen, but also he really took the liveliest interest in our conversation.

On the night in question he had thus, as his custom was, returned. I don't know how it was, but somehow our conversation had taken an unusually historical turn, and we had found ourselves in solemn debate on the fruitful topic of Henry VIII. and his wives. Somehow we got a little "mixed" in discussing the order of that bevy of unhappy ladies.

"Let me see," said my father, laying down his knife and fork, "who came first, towards the end, was it Anne of Cleves, or Catherine Parr, or Catherine Howard?"

Before I had time to marshal the close of

the procession, Hutton bent gently over me, and in a most suggestive voice remarked, "My lady, does your Ladyship think, *might* it be the Lady Jane Grey, my lady?"

Mixed as we were, I had some light on this point, but I remember that I feared to hurt the feelings of my assisting friend, so I dissembled and seemed for a moment to meditate, and then whispered over my shoulder, "Well, no, let me see, I think not? I think she came later."

You see we were not great in history at Ravensthorpe! And my conscience still reproves me for leading my good old servant to paint the doughty king even blacker than he was, and to believe that a seventh lady had shared his dangerous throne!

I remember well also that night, our conversation was more serious and more

interesting. My father sat late. And as I sat upon his knee, he talked so much of my dear mother, and I never loved him so as when he talked of her.

I stole back into the gallery when the house was still. The strange light there was brighter than usual. But, oddly it seemed to me, the picture of the cavalier and his lady was in shade, and all the brightness was on my mother's face, and I felt certain I saw her smile.

I slept very peacefully that night. I seemed so cared-for and comforted, I knew not why. God was, I felt, so near, and all sorts of dear kind messages seemed whispered to me by some one. And I had sweet and restful thoughts of Walter, and again that indescribable sense of peace, as of one who is in the path of duty. Many happy days was I to have there again, but

that was the last night of the old unchanging life at Ravensthorpe.

XVIII.

AND now I shall soon have to carry you forward almost exactly a year, when, on September 28th, we were again at Ravensthorpe.

That year had been eventful enough, but it is not needful for my purpose to dwell at any great length upon it; but I must pause for a moment, to give you an idea of our life in Rome.

The duchess (not *my* Duchess, but Lord Arthur's mother), with Lord Arthur, her son, and her daughter, Lady Alice, spent the winter in Florence. I took for granted that Walter was constantly with them, and that his engagement would soon be announced; and Miss Majoribanks, who

made her appearance about Christmas, assured me that she knew for a fact they were to be married in the summer.

Lord Arthur also came, but to my astonishment, when my father inquired for "Sir Walter," he declared they had scarcely seen him, and said he couldn't make Walter out," he was so changed and down in heart when he *had* seen him.

There was a Mr. Holbrook a good deal with us, a son of Lord Fulford's, who was exceedingly kind to me. Of him I had never thought as a lover, until I became aware that several people of whom we saw a good deal made stupid remarks, and gave hints and insinuations which opened my blind eyes to the fact that he was believed to be an admirer of mine. Then I was really unhappy, for the worst was, my father seemed so fond of him, and

I began to question myself as to whether I had acted thoughtlessly in any way so that he could have imagined that I had any special affection for him. I do not think I had ; we had been pleasant acquaintances, that was all ; Love and all that sort of thing I had never thought about at any time—except in the way I have told you of in regard to Walter—and had acted towards this gentleman, I am sure, simply and frankly. As for *loving* him I knew I never could, for the one thing I was quite resolved upon was, at all cost, to be true to myself. I was, however, a little unhappy about it, and all the more as Miss Majoribanks made herself uncommonly busy, and actually went so far as to tell me I ought to consider the matter seriously, as it “would evidently be pleasing to my father.”

This I was certain was false, and I

disliked Miss Majoribanks for saying such things. I resolved to speak to my father myself about her foolish remarks.

Accordingly one evening I *did* speak to him with some warmth of what she had said. He was as much displeased as I could be, and spoke his mind with unvarnished plainness as to what I must call Miss Majoribank's unwomanly meddling. How often, oh! how often, I had longed for my mother at such times! But, indeed, no mother could have been more wise and tender than he. He said he liked Mr. Holbrook very much—and he *was* a man to be liked—and told me that had *I* loved the young man he could not have *objected* to my choice, but assured me, at the same time with distinct emphasis, that nothing was farther from his thoughts and wishes, and advised me to treat that kind of silly

gossip as it deserved ; and I never shall forget his unfeigned horror at the bare notion of my marrying to please *him*.

I remember—dear old father—how tenderly he folded me in his arms, and said, “When that day comes, my Dorothy, it will be hard to part with you, but it would be unendurable were I to give you to any man but one deserving of you, *and* whom you *loved*.”

This was a real relief to me, for though I had been sure it was so, and though—had it not been—I never could have been other than true to myself in a matter of that kind, still it was pleasant to know for certain that my conduct was no sort of distress to my dear father. The whole thing was rather a worry, though, for it chilled the frankness and ease of intercourse between Mr. Holbrook and myself

for a day or two, for I thought I was bound to take pains then, while being courteous to him, to show him that I never could return his affection for me, if indeed, as they said, he felt such. This made me feel stiff and unnatural for a few days: but one can't go on in that way, and I soon put aside this nonsense and forgot all about it. However, foolish tongues are serious dangers, and Miss Majoribanks had nearly, by her activity in gossip, brought on my life a lasting sorrow. This you will understand presently, as I did afterwards; I was in happy ignorance of it now.

XIX.

WE lived in the Via Rasella, which runs, as you know, from the street connecting the

Piazza Barberini with the Esquiline down towards the Corso. It is a narrow street, and with no special interest about it. We were there, however, because my father loved to be at peace ; and in those days the Piazza di Spagna, and the streets about it, were little else than an English quarter, and filled with people whom we knew. Our "Palazzo" was old and thoroughly Italian, and very peaceful, and our landlady was a sweet little Italian lady, married to a banker of English parentage, on which account she made occasional attempts to speak our language, I am bound to say with no very great success.

The English in Rome in those days seemed to know and care as little for the real life of the people as if they were keeping a winter season in London. Not so my father. We did of course see our

friends in the Piazza di Spagna and thereabouts, but the greater part of our time was spent in our own quiet way.

Rome is an infinite place. There are so many Past *upon* you there; at first you are lost in the confusing cross mazes of history; but it is not mere antiquarian facts which really move you, it is a general sense of a strange and mysterious life, that for ages has made the Eternal City memorable, which excites the imagination, and possesses the heart.

We had our quiet times of prayer in the churches, for my father, though a loyal and loving member of our dear English Church, had not a touch of narrow Protestantism about him, but ever entered into all that was really Christian, and beautiful, and devout; and it always seemed to me that he was naturally and easily inclined to

dwelt with happiness upon the matters which united Christians rather than upon those which unhappily divide them. It was not indeed that his faith was not clear and strong and definite, for it always was, but that his heart was so full of tenderness as well as strength.

I learnt a great deal from him about art this winter, for we spent much of our morning hours in galleries and museums, in which Rome is so rich.

However, I think what were really our happiest hours, were when we rode together in the Campagna, and he talked to me of the great Roman Past, while we were continually enjoying that varying scene of mysterious and infinite beauty, which never palls upon one as one watches the changing lights and shadows over that unrivalled landscape of mountains, and plain, and distant sea.

I loved also, and so did he, to notice the pretty picturesque ways of the people. In particular it was a great delight to listen to the pifferari, who came down in those days with their strange costumes from the mountains, and played their joyous and melancholy music before the Madonna shrines in the streets; and in the early mornings when we often went for a few quiet moments to the church of the Cappucini, I did so delight in watching the flocks of goats driven in for milking, and lying about in the oddest groups with their sylvan-looking goatherds in the Piazza Barberini.

Indeed some of these goats came very early each morning to the doorway of our little Palazzo to be milked for me, for goat's milk was one of the medicines prescribed for my health. Such times were times of mixed enjoyment also to Cogsie,

for he did not altogether approve of the goats, and many a battle he had with them on these mornings : but I am bound to say he by no means came off victorious, and usually with prudence was driven to retire. Dear Cogsie ! he had a way of putting on the air of a conqueror, and of one who had nobly done his duty ; but if the truth were told, he had really ended his performances by running away

In the evenings we were by no means always alone, for do what we would, many friends came to see us ; but when we *were* alone, we had our old pleasant occupation of reading in Italian literature, and of music with my violin.

When first we were in Rome, the weather was often exceedingly cold ; but as the season wore on, it became warmer, and then, especially when the moon was up, we had such pleasant wanderings

through the more interesting parts of the old city.

One evening in particular I especially recall, because it is closely connected with the main facts of my story. We had spent the morning in the Rospigliosi Palace, examining and discussing Guido's splendid ceiling-painting of the Aurora. I was tired on my return, and spent the afternoon on the sofa while my father read aloud; but the evening turned out more than usually lovely, and accordingly after an early dinner my father fell in with my longing to spend a little time on the terrace of the Lateran, and sit and watch the evening lights, and the early moonrise across the Campagna and over the Alban hills. Coming home we wandered about the Colosseum, and then slowly down the Forum Romanum, and then we turned about and made for the Forum of

Trajan, and by-and-by went wandering on till we found ourselves at Trevi. The moon was now up in real power, and pouring floods of light down on the city.

At Trevi we sat down on the steps before the glorious fountain, to listen to the plash of the waters, and watch the swaying lights and shadows.

I was in my favourite vein of spiritual speculation, and we had gradually drifted into a discussion on the nearness, and mystery, and beauty of the unseen world.

At a pause in the conversation, I suddenly took courage to tell my father all about my extraordinary experiences at Ravensthorpe. He listened with evident interest, and then as he sat with his arm round me in our shadowy retreat, he drew me nearer to him and kissed me tenderly.

“My Dorothy,” he said at last, “I cannot say that these things are mere fancy

and dreams; there does seem sufficient evidence to prove that such strange intimations are accorded to some from the other world. I cannot say what they may mean, my darling child," he added gravely, "but I am sure in such things we are always safe, if we love God and do our duty, and hold the Faith."

"Certainly," he added after a pause, "there are some strange things connected with our family in relation to those ancestors of whom you speak, and indeed, my child, I am sure if goodness and prayer in those belonging to them can help some who have gone, their poor souls must be helped by *you*."

My dear father, this was so like him; he was always full of such indulgent love to me.

"Of one thing, Dorothy," he went on, "I am quite sure, the words which have

somehow struck you are in themselves wise mottoes and messages, '*Avant Rarensthorpe, jamais derrière,*' 'suffer and be strong,' 'be faithful, be true,'—to these, my child, whatever comes, be loyal in life and you cannot go far wrong."

We sat on silently for a time both of us thinking our own thoughts, and then I knelt down to drink of the waters of Trevi. As I rose from my knees, I was watching, in a pleasant dream, the flashing waves as they widened out over the rocks below the great Neptune and his Tritons, and fell into the lakelet at my feet, when I noticed the figure of a man wrapped in a plaid, leaning against the stone-work at the opposite angle of the fountain. Just as I saw him he moved, and the moonlight fell upon his face and hair.

There was no mistaking him, at least not for me.

Was I in a dream ? or was this reality ? Wherever I went, whatever I did, there was, in spite of myself, an image in my heart that I could never banish ; and why should I ? It was the sunlight and moonlight both of my own very life. It is a strange mystery this,—the power which makes *one*, some *one* the dearest of all, and now, the *one* constant vision in my heart was before me suddenly—I was sure of it—in actual fact.

“It is he !” I cried, forgetting everything else for a moment, and springing up straight to my feet. “It is Walter, father it is Walter.”

In another moment I felt ashamed of myself : but Walter had heard me, for indeed it was he, and he came towards us quickly.

He seemed embarrassed and agitated, and certainly *I* felt so ; but in a moment

we exchanged our greetings, and then he explained that he had come unexpectedly to Rome, had called at the Via Rasella, and finding us out, had gone out for a moonlight ramble ; “ and now,” he said in rather a constrained voice, “ I have had the good fortune to light upon you.”

We walked very slowly home together, and he and my father talked of his work at Florence, and his sudden visit to Rome, but, for my part, I did not speak a word.

At the door of our Palazzo we stopped for a few minutes, for he declined to come in, said he was leaving at an early hour for Naples, and then bade us adieu.

Just as he was going, he seemed to hesitate, and then turned back.

“ Dorothy,” he said in a shy sort of way, and flushing as he spoke, “ I have two fine old cameos of Michael Angelo’s

‘Night’ and ‘Morning’ which I picked up in Florence ; I know you like these things, would you care to have them ? ”

“ How kind of you, Walter,” I answered with the real pleasure I felt, “ I should very much, indeed.”

“ Really ? ” was all he said ; but I remembered the eager tone of his voice, and his puzzled, sad look, as he said it, and noticed a hesitation in his manner as he drew out the case.

“ Yes, really and truly,” I answered, as was natural.

“ Then take them, Dolly,” he said, quite in his old way, “ and keep them, will you, for my sake ? ”

“ I will, Walter,” I said, and we shook hands, and he was gone.

I watched him for half a minute, and then flew up to my room to examine my treasures. They *were* beautiful cameos,

but I don't think I thought of their beauty, exactly. *He* had given them to me, and *that* was their value. I hope I was not very foolish, for I think I shed some tears, not all unhappy, and I kissed the cameos again and again.

I felt so perfectly at ease with my dear father that night, as I had told him all, that when I was leaving him, and as I kissed him to say "Good-night," I spoke to him in as calm a voice as I could command, of Miss Majoribanks' assurances that Walter and Lady Alice were engaged.

"I don't believe it," my father answered, almost angrily; and then he said more quietly, and as if thinking to himself, "Well, perhaps it is so. Miss Majoribanks does find out most things, although her discoveries are not always true; and she is *very* handsome and attractive. It would be what the world would call a

good match for both. I hope she will make him happy, I hope so. She is scarcely worthy of him; there are not many like Walter." He sighed as he said it.

"Not many like Walter!" No, I should think not indeed! I knew that myself; and it was long before I could sleep, I felt so troubled by my father's evident fear that his marriage—of which I entertained no doubt whatever—would not be for his happiness. Ah, me! how miserable that thought made me. I could only pray that it might not be so, and I did pray very earnestly, until sleep at last came to me, for dear Walter, and I tried to pray for Lady Alice, because he loved her.

In another fortnight Holy Week had come. The English in large numbers, and the Americans in even larger, were pressing to the Sistine for the service of *Tenebræ*, which so many of them are

pleased to call "the Ceremonies!" At home or abroad, I never could but love the tender and solemn services which relate to the Passion of our Lord. But though I tried my best to enter into them, and though there could not have been a dearer or more devout companion at such a time than my dear father, still I was—I know I was—very wretched. The shadows of a fear that my father's words had cast over the probability of brightness for Walter's future clouded everything we did. I tried to escape from this darkness, but I did not succeed in the effort. There is no cloud so dark, I think, as the shadow of unhappiness thrown across the path of one we love.

It was soon after this that Walter was again in Rome. He called to see us, and though I *did* feel miserably excited, yet I

think I managed to be friendly and calm, for I had it fixed in my mind that *that* other marriage was really soon to be.

I thought he would tell us of it now, but he did not. He was only in Rome two days, but to me they were days of real sunshine, and especially on the evening on which he left, when he and I had a short walk together on the Pincian. He seemed nervous, and looked pale, and was very silent. I thought he was bracing himself up to announce his engagement, but he spoke not a word of it, and at parting said in a strange, sad voice that he “hoped I would be happy” Happy indeed! I could never be happy, I knew, away from him, and it seemed such a strange thing to say!

Dear, dear Walter, in spite of all my

self-restraint and resolution, when he was gone again I was very miserable.

XX.

WELL, time went on; we left dear old Rome, and when it came to going—as every one must be, I think, I was full of regrets. We visited many interesting places on our journey north, and especially the shrine of my beloved S. Francis at Assisi, and then we were at the Lakes in summer, and by the 14th of September once more at Ravensthorpe. The house filled at once, and the very same people, with a few additions, were with us again as had been just a year before.

I thought Lady Alice, if possible, more beautiful. Walter looked pale and anxious. There was the same cheery, kind

manner, and the same frank, beautiful smile, the same manly readiness, too, to lend a hand in every undertaking ; but he seemed older, less a boy and more a man, and thoughtful and grave, as if he had had a struggle and felt the weight of some pressing care. I too was older. I felt it. I felt that, a mere child a year ago, I was now a woman. And I, too, had had my heavy care and bitter sorrow.

It was quite extraordinary how the evening of the 28th of September reproduced its predecessor of a year before. If there had not been some slight difference in the guests, and if I had not felt myself older and more mistress of the situation than formerly, I should have fancied the whole thing was a dream.

Coming down the great staircase again, I saw Walter gazing up at me. His great

blue eyes looked large and sad, and the Sun God in the Rospigliosi was not half so beautiful as his noble face and head, with the fairness of childhood almost in its Saxon beauty and the tenderness and strength of a very man.

“Would Lady Dorothy like a rose?” he said, and the evening of last year was before me in an instant. Why should I take his rose? it ought to be for another. Again and again Miss Majoribanks had assured me she knew Sir Walter and Lady Alice were engaged. I must take care of my acts, I thought, if I couldn’t restrain my poor heart, so I simply said, in a half-joking way and with quiet indifference in my tone, belying altogether the heartache within,—

“Thank you, no, Sir Walter, the roses in September are poor worn-out things,” and I went quietly past him.

I saw him flush, and certainly, when I think of it, it was a flush of pain. I noticed he did not wear any flower in his coat that evening.

That evening, however, he was full of life, and so was I; *I was determined* to be; *he*, I thought, was naturally so. Lady Alice and he had, I somehow fancied, seen strangely little of one another since their arrival, but *that* evening he seemed to dance attendance on her enough to please any one if she liked it. Mr. Holbrook, too, was there, and as pleasant with me as could be, but I flattered myself that no one, not even Miss Majoribanks, could imagine us in any sense lovers. I had not realized the mischief which may be effected by a dangerous tongue!

As before, Aunt Miriam played her rubber; as before, I armed her to her room. Now, however, I had to return to

act as hostess, and talked and laughed with the merriest until the rest were ready to retire.

At last it was over—this weary strain. Why, I knew not, but *this* night I had been more miserable than for months before.

I soon was in my bedroom, and I sent McQuoid off, and again was alone. It had all come back again. Where was the use of all this struggle? I was as weak as a year ago. I sat on my sofa to think and think in my misery, and then tears came, and I buried my face in the pillow and cried, oh! so bitterly! “Oh! that my mother were alive,” I cried, and scarcely had I said the words than my old resolution came back. “I will lay it at her grave as I did before,” I said. “I will not be beaten by it, I *will* conquer.”

I had let my hair fall down about my

shoulders, "that wealth of golden brown," I remembered now again, more than a year ago, he had called it. I felt sick that I had ever allowed him to see it so and to use such words.

Never mind; I was strong now. I found a soft dark shawl, I shook my long hair back and drew the shawl under it round my shoulders. The pin he had given me a year ago was lying on my dressing-table. I couldn't help looking at it lovingly. If this thought were still part of me, and so to be, as I feared, for ever, there could be no harm in letting *that* symbol have its place. I thrust it into my shawl, and blew my candle out, and opened the door and listened.

There were voices in the hall; the gentlemen were going to bed. They were lighting their candles, and dawdling as men do in their final good-nights. They

say we women gossip. To my thinking, none are so prolific in last words at night as men are. And then what woman can compete with them in the art of hanging about with candles in their hands and spilling the grease all over the carpets!

I felt my heart stop as I heard Walter's voice; he was talking to Lord Arthur.

"I'm tired to death," I heard him say. "This place bores me. All life is *tædium vite*. We have had no music to-night, it has been duller than dull. I *hate* these games."

"I say, old fellow!" I heard Lord Arthur answer in a cheery tone, "what's gone wrong with you? You're in love, *you* are! eh!"

"Love! Bosh!" was the answer.

I closed the door and blushed. I *felt* that I blushed in the darkness. What a fool I had been!

I opened the door again. I heard the voices die away, as they all dispersed for the night; and then there was a sound of the servants; they were putting out the lights. I went out on the landing, and crossed hurriedly into the little end gallery and looked down on the great hall.

I saw the last footman disappear through the door at the further end, and as his receding footsteps died away all became still. The fire was burning low; one of the huge logs fell with a crash and sent up sparks and renewed a brighter flame. I saw Cogsie curl himself up on the soft rug by the fireplace, and with a contented grunt settle himself to sleep. Poor Cogsie! he usually slept in my room; I had forgotten him that night. The gigantic shadows rose and fell, and flickered up and sank away among the rafters of the roof.

I leant my elbows on the balustrade and looked down. My tears were now again falling fast. I was very unhappy. Here I was after a whole year of struggle as miserable as ever. "Faithful" indeed I had been to Walter's love, and "true" to myself, of that I was glad, but though peace had seemed to come for a time, now there was no peace. I was so lonely. Who could I speak to? I could have spoken to my father, but I shrank from paining him; in this I was wrong and unworthy of him; I have since realized that the deepest pain to such a heart as his is to be *not* trusted with the sorrows of one loved as he loved me. "Oh! mother, mother," I moaned, as my tears crept through my fingers; and then again I started and felt strong; of course I must again go to her grave.

I turned and stepped down the narrow staircase, and softly opened the door at the bottom and entered the hall. Cogsie heard me, but he knew my step; he came to meet me in the twilight, wagging his tail in a sleepy way; he thought I was coming for *him*!

“Lie down, Cogsie,” I said in a whisper, and took him back to settle him on his rug. He watched me as I opened the door into the passage at the end, and then I stole out and closed it behind me.

It was quite dark, but I knew every step. I went very softly as I passed the library door. Perhaps my father might be there. I felt sure he was there. If so, I took care he should not hear me.

I reached the conservatory door, and drew back the bolts slowly and softly, fearing every sound. I was soon *in* the

conservatory, then another door had to be opened, and I was out into the night.

It was a dank night, and there was a rising wind. I shivered, and paused for a moment with an unnamed fear. No, I would on! I was quite determined. It was my only hope. Though that thought had possessed me a year ago, it had not unnerved me, but with it I had found peace and strength, when I had laid it at my mother's tomb. I would do so again.

I walked on fast down the little gravel path towards the wood. The wood was very dark, and the raindrops which had lodged upon the branches kept fitfully falling. I had a creepy, fearful feeling, which made me hurry on. Under the shade of the trees it was such utter night

that I ran against the low churchyard wall and bruised my hand.

I groped along for the gate. It was open. Then I paused; the aged, tortuous yew-tree inside was dreadful in its darkness. I thought I heard a sound. No, it was nothing but the last echo of the crunch in the gravel made by my own feet, and the sad moaning of the storm-laden branches, and the sobbing of the sea.

I felt the wind playing with my hair, and half resented it in my fanciful, frightened way. It was only *he* who had been allowed to do *that*. Was I dreaming? I seized the brooch which fastened my shawl to remind myself and give me courage. The pin pierced my finger and hurt me. I was glad of it. It startled me into strength again.

This was the very spot, too! How well

I remembered it! Here, more than a year before, the pin had fallen, here he caught my vagrant hat, and caught my falling hair, saying, "Such a wealth of golden brown!" I shuddered. Oh, why, why had I thought of that? I was beginning to tremble; if I did not reach the church soon, I was sure that I should faint. Faint! I had never fainted in my life but that once, now more than a year ago, and there was no one near to find me now. No one to lift me and lead me home. The thought was horrible. I turned for a moment and looked. This was the spot from which the great end window of the south wing could be plainly seen, and, dark as it was, I saw it. There! It was all illuminated! There was that extraordinary light, and to-night certainly it was brighter than ever. I

don't know why, but I was glad of it. It did not frighten me, it was an old friend; and I could, in my mind's eye, see my sweet mother's picture, and the other one so strange and sad.

I turned and went on. I reached the porch. Now, if I had forgotten the key! No, it was safe. I drew it from my pocket, and fumbled for the lock.

Try to enter *any* door in the darkness (much more a church door!) when the keyhole is difficult to find, and you will always hurry, and think that some one is coming up behind you! I had this terrified feeling now. At last I found the keyhole, and turned the key. The door opened, and I was inside. I gave a deep sigh of relief as I closed the door behind me. Now I was safe. A sweet, strange calm came over me. I was never afraid

of being alone with God and with the dead.

I have often been afraid of the living. But the dear dead ! Those who *know*, those to whom the inner mystery is plain, those for whom this wretched pantomime of life is over, those who gravely review the Past, and feel no touch of Time, but only the still, untroubled presence of Eternity ! Who could be afraid of them !

And God ! Who understands it all, and listens so patiently and tenderly, and enters into all your secret troubles, and needs no explanation ! Awe-stricken I have always felt in that tremendous Presence, but scarcely afraid !

I stopped inside to gaze and think. Now I was in peace and safety. And after this long year of separation, how glad I was to see it all once more !

Before me was the Chantry ; it stretched dimly away into the darkness, where the two tombs lay on either side, and nearer, the one lamp burned with a weird, mysterious flicker, showing dimly my mother's grave. There she lay, silent and placid in the cold white marble, that stately form which I had often gazed at, expecting it almost to take life, and rise and move ! And the flickering red light of the lamp burned near it, watching it till the morning of the Resurrection.

Yes ! I felt safe now. Below, the light shone red through the glasses, but above it rose white towards the high groined roof. The altar was in gloom, and moving shadows rose and fell, and swayed about, and swept away in dim procession among the arches.

With God and my mother, I felt always

at peace. You must feel at peace with those who love you. On my mother's love I could rest; whatever Walter's was, of *that* love I was certain. No chance or change can touch a love sealed by Eternity.

"I will go first to God," I said solemnly, "then to the dead." I slipped behind the pillar and through the seats, and came out into the main aisle. The choir was still and splendid. I thought I had never seen it look so glorious.

The three great lamps burnt red through their glasses, with just the faintest flicker, for the wind that was moaning round the church had found some crevice by which to enter, but *they* looked majestic and still. The lights rose white far up in the great groined roof, and the shadows moved more stealthily and with

more stately measure than in the Chantry. The tall altar candles seemed to live and wait, waiting to hail the Sacrament. The cluster of angels bearing the symbols of the Passion behind and around the Crucifix, appeared to move as if they whispered in their heavenly language about the everlasting Mystery of the Suffering Christ.

I fell on my knees and buried my face in my hands, and prayed. Oh! *how* I prayed! I asked for light and strength and guidance, to know God's will and do it. Simply that. I asked for a brave and constant heart, and for forgiveness if I had dealt wrongly in any measure with that love that held me. And oh! the more I prayed, the more that love seemed to take form and force.

No, I had made no mistake a year ago. I was more than ever sure of it. I loved

him. I had found the love of my life. When you have found your love, you have found that mysterious treasure which makes life sad or glad.

Again it was clear, clearer than ever, whatever came to me in life *that* was part of me. I had put it all before God a year ago, and the more I had put it before Him and prayed then for its banishment the tighter it had grasped me ; and now, more than before even, I felt, for ever it must be mine.

Then a sweet thought came. Suffering or no suffering, whatever it brings, certainly it is God's will. I *must* love him, and "I will," I said aloud and solemnly, as if it were my marriage morning. None shall ever know it, I thought, he never ; but this I am as certain of as ever, "I will be faithful." Then again, solemnly and

aloud, I repeated, "I will be faithful."

I raised my eyes, the choir was dim and glorious, and the Great Angels still were waiting on the Crucified, and God seemed to be speaking to me and sending me by them a message of strange, deep peace.

I now never thought of Walter's love being known or named. No, nor of him himself exactly. It seemed an ideal love, stronger than any that is bounded by an individual life; and this had *come* to me, I had not sought it, nay that dream-like whisper, heard in my faint that well-remembered day, "My darling, more to me than all the world," seemed to free me from the fear of unmaidenly daring in holding such a love to my heart. I was clear again, what God had given, I must be faithful to. I must for ever love him.

I started. There was a sound. Certainly there was a sound. The handle was turning in the door. I crept along on my knees, deep into the shadow of a pillar, and held my breath and listened. The door slowly opened, and closed again. Some one had entered. Whoever it was, paused a moment, then walked quietly towards the Chantry. Then another pause.

I thought the mysterious visitor must be gazing through the screen at my mother's tomb. Indeed, I felt sure it was so. I held my breath. It seemed very awful, but somehow I had no fear. The peace of God was round me. When the peace of God is round you, it is like a warm garment wrapping you safely from the cold; it is like strong arms, strong and tender; tender to embrace you, strong

to support. You can't be *frightened* when protected by the peace of God.

Now there was a moment's silence, and then the footsteps advanced across towards the chancel-screen. I buried my face in my hands in silent awe. I thought the dead were moving. The footsteps paused before the entrance to the Chancel. I raised my eyes in timid wonder. No ! it was not the dead, it was the living. There was no mistaking it. It was Walter himself. I could make no mistake about that figure. Who ever mistook, even in such dim light, the one they loved with heart and soul as I loved him ? I saw him fall upon his knees at the entrance in the chancel-screen. The silence of his prayer was awful. I began to think " could I slip away ? " Impossible. In that still church a pin's fall would have been heard as plainly as a thunder-peal. I

must wait until he had gone. I felt myself safe in the shadow, and now *I* prayed. I prayed for him. I prayed for her quite naturally and easily for his sake. That renewed vow of faithfulness impelled me to act upon it at once ;—and prayer *is* act with God. Since he loved her, as I supposed, for her I would pray with all my heart. I did. I really think I took her to my heart again, and only felt a pang that I had ever been so cruel or so mean as to put her from it.

I don't know how long the stillness lasted. Then it was broken by a heaving high up in the tower, and the great clock struck one—two—three—four, and so on it went to midnight. It was the morning of the Angels' Festival !

At last I saw him rise from his knees. He advanced slowly up the Chancel

towards the three great lamps. He turned and looked across to the Chantry towards the tombs. With folded arms he stood and gazed and gazed in silence. I watched him with awe-struck fascination. Then suddenly I saw him give a start and tremble. Then he turned or half-turned towards the dim and silent nave where I was kneeling, and his face I could see in the faint light from the lamps, was deadly pale.

Then—could it be?—I heard my own name breaking that awful stillness. “Dorothy,” he said, and oh! in such a pleading tone! “Dorothy, Dorothy, come, come.”

I never thought of pausing, indeed, I think, I never *thought* at all. I was by his side in a moment. He had stretched out his left hand, and I caught it. It was deadly cold.

“Look !” he whispered, “look, look !”

I was nearer the High Altar now than he, and we were both facing the Chantry. And what a sight it was ! The light of the one lamp by my mother’s tomb never gave all that radiance. I know that now, for I remember how strangely clear and strong the light was, but at the time I did not think of it. Such a thing could not strike me then with that astonishing vision before me, for this is what we saw.

Face to face on the step above my mother’s tomb, and below the altar, there stood two figures. *I* knew them perfectly. I had often gazed upon them in the picture in the old gallery. They were no new presences to me. Just like the picture, there was a youthful and noble figure of a young man, and before him that of a beautiful girl. Just like the picture, the young man

clasped the girl's hands with passionate determination in both of his : but, unlike the picture, she gazed on him and he on her, with such a look of heavenly tenderness ! I felt no fear ; it was too beautiful. Her eyes yearned towards him in unutterable love, and he looked down on her with such a look of penitent devotion—oh ! it was beautiful. I thought I saw his lips move and hers too. I heard no sound, but somehow he seemed to say, “For ever,” and she to repeat, “For ever.” And this was not my fancy, for afterwards Walter told me he had been conscious of it too.

Who measures the things of that other world by the measurements of this ? Who tells the acts of an eternal country, which lies close round us, by the beats of passing Time ? How long we stood and watched

them there I know not. To look back upon it seemed a long time. I suppose, in fact, it was only some few seconds. Still wrapped, we stood and gazed and gazed. Then suddenly they were gone. The Chantry shadows swayed about the tombs ; the single flickering lamp watched by my mother's grave ; the angels of the Passion in the choir, held still their solemn conclave round the Crucifix ; the high altar waited in its patient majesty, waited for the coming Sacrament ; and *we* stood there, silent, side by side, with hand clasped in hand ; stood silent, I and the man I loved above my life, beyond all worlds—stood silent, gazing simply, and rapt, as though it were the one thing on earth most naturally to be done, gazing and scarcely thinking in an awe-struck, happy dream !

At last he turned and led me forward a

step or two, and we fell upon our knees before the high altar.

“Dorothy, my own darling,” he whispered solemnly, and his voice trembled with emotion, “before God and His angels, do you love me?”

“I do,” I answered.

“Thank God!” he said, with a long sigh of relief, and I felt him tremble.

“Will you be my wife? Will you be mine? ‘For ever?’”

I think *I* said “Thank God,” as I had never said it before, but to him in a whisper I answered. “I will: for ever.”

Then we were silent. I am sure we prayed together a eucharistic prayer, a prayer of great thanksgiving. Then we rose from our knees. He took both my hands in his, and our lips met in the first long kiss of love, heaven-blest, that knows

no breaking. And then he led me through the chancel and we walked slowly from the church.

Outside the church I knew he held his hand out for the key. I gave it him. He turned it in the door, and drew my arm through his, and we walked silently towards the hall.

I heard the sobbing sea; I heard the sighing wind; I felt no rain-drops, for the night had cleared; I only felt so safe, and oh! so happy!

We passed through the conservatory. As we passed, a rose, wet with the rain-drops and tossed and troubled by the wind, had blown across our path. He plucked it and gave it me. "You *will* take this rose, dear one," he said. I only said "Yes, Walter," and remembered, as he remembered, that other one I had refused. It was

sweet to me that he remembered that, I saw at once how faithfully unswerving his love had been. That rose I treasure still.

He fastened the door behind us, and we went quietly along the passages and into the great hall. Cogsie rose sleepily and wagged his tail, and settled down again on the soft rug at our feet to finish his interrupted night's rest. Walter gave a half-dying log a push in the fire-place, and there rose up a feeble blaze. We gazed at the fire a moment or two, and then he turned and folded me in his arms.

"My own, my love, my life, my darling, I feared you did not love me."

"Oh! Walter!" It was all that I could say.

He kissed me again and again, and then I laid my head upon his breast and cried, oh! such happy tears!

“Are you happy, dear one?”

“Oh! so happy!”

“But, Walter,” I said at last, “how was it? why did you come? It seems like nothing but a dream!”

“It is no dream, my little one,” he said, “but God’s own good truth.” Then he paused, and then, “I don’t know how it was; you have often said your mother watched over you, your mother and the angels. It is so. I have been so miserable all this last wretched year. I have loved you, Dorothy, with all my heart, so long, you, and none other. They told me in Florence you loved another, and that you were soon to be his wife. I thought it was so; twice I tried to speak to you in Rome, but failed; I did not dare to hear what I thought was the cruel truth from your own

lips, and then I gave up all hope, but I knew that none but you could ever hold my heart. I almost resolved not to come here this time, but when it came to it, I felt that I *must* see you, darling, if only for once more, even though—as I imagined, as they told me—I should witness with my own eyes that you loved—not me. And then these last days I have been unutterably wretched; and dreadful thoughts were in my mind; I tried to put it from me, all in vain! A year ago I swore that to you I would be faithful, for I must; and when you left the room to-night, just as it was a year ago, everything seemed dark and lost, and I was, ah! God, how wretched! I lay down on my bed in misery, and said that life was emptiness and nothingness to me. I don't know if I slept, but this I know, I saw your

mother—yes, I saw her plainly as I now see you, my darling. She took me by the hand and led me out, out into the night, at least I thought she did. She looked so beautiful and sad, and yet so tender, and still a look of hope was in her eyes, the same sweet eyes as yours, my dear one, the same fresh look of youth, and she had such sunny hair, the same bright golden brown, but not so beautiful as yours, sweetheart,”—and he stroked my hair tenderly as he spoke—“and then, and then she was gone, and I was near the church, and *why* I entered there I know not, only I felt that I *must* enter, and then, you know the rest, only that when I saw *them* ”—and he spoke in a low and reverent voice—“ I felt that there was nothing left but to call for you. I did not know that you were there—(how came you to be there, my little one?)—only I did not

wonder at your coming, I knew that you would come, my darling." And then again he folded me to his breast until I cried my heart out beneath his kisses.

I don't know when I slept that night. I did sleep, but I know the only words that came to me for prayer were, "Thank God—for ever—my own dear Walter—my own sweet mother."

Waking on the bright September morning, I feared it might have been a dream.

No! that wind-tossed rose lay there beside my pillow, where I had kissed it as I fell asleep.

It was no dream.

Our love was real as the Angels' joy.

XXI.

“Now you know all, my Dorothy,” my mother added; “to no one else but you have I ever told it all; but you and Ravensthorpe should know it, and any others whom you please to tell. Now you know why your father and I have been so happy. Now you know why, since God has taken him, in all my dreadful sorrow, this last year, I have been not unhappy, waiting to meet him. Now you know why no weird lights flicker in the gallery, and why, though ghosts are talked of, they are never seen, and why that other picture hangs fronting the former ones, and in it the two figures have clasped hands, and faces *not* turned away. Now you know how he and I fulfilled the pledge of that once broken vow, and why

those two poor souls have slept in peace. Now you know why the wreaths of flowers are always to be laid, on the eve of the Angels' Festival, upon my mother's tomb, and that other wreath for my dear, dear father, since he slept there," and as she said this she brushed away a tear that fell upon her cheek. "Now you know why the lamps are always burning. Keep them so, my child. Give me your father's picture. Ah! the same fair brow, the same frank, pleasant smile, the same golden curly hair, the same kind eyes, so kind, so true! Ah! my child, love is a blessed power, true love, my Dorothy, is eternal. Ah! it's long waiting, without him! My Walter! My own dear Walter! My own dear husband! It's oh! to be with him, where he waits for me—with God!"

My own sweet mother ! it was *not* long waiting. She died that night. We laid her in the Chantry beside him ; in that same Chantry, so sacred from the passionate love he had given her and the tender devotion she had given him in return. We laid her by his side in that Chantry where the vow was made and broken, and remade again and fulfilled to all eternity. There they sleep together, and there the lamp burns still.

Wise people may doubt this story, if they please, but *they* are wiser who believe it. Love is a power of inexhaustible resources, *the* one real power in this sad world. Love is of God. True Love is eternal.

I could not wish her back again, though it is sad without her, for somehow, as I stood in the Chantry, where we left her in

her last sleep beside him, there passed and repassed in my brain the echo of a sad sweet song :—

“ But only in my lone life’s autumn weather,
I watch there with clear eyes ;
Thinking, oh ! what it will be in paradise,
When we’re again together ? ”

THE END.

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